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The beginning of intervention : a study of the working relationship between the state Department of Education and underperforming schools during the implementation of new school accountability policy.

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THE BEGINNING OF INTERVENTION: A STUDY OF THE WORKING RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND UNDERPERFORMING SCHOOLS DURING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF NEW SCHOOL ACCOUNTABILITY POLICY

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ABSTRACT

THE BEGINNING OF INTERVENTION: A STUDY OF THE WORKING RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND UNDERPERFORMING SCHOOLS DURING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF NEW SCHOOL ACCOUNTABILITY POLICY

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New school accountability policy alters how the state department of education (SDE) and underperforming school interact by creating a direct connection between the two. The "beginning of intervention" is when the SDE and the underperforming school commence their working relationship. Challenges to the development of a relationship include limited capacity at the SDE level and the local educators' perceptions of new school accountability as a deterrent policy. The working relationship is the vehicle for bridging the state's externally imposed and school's internally pre-existing accountability systems; to negotiate the implementation of the policy for the dual purpose of making sense of the policy for the school and the SDE and meeting the end goal of the policy by improving the educational outcomes of the school; and to alter educators' perceptions of new school accountability policy from that of a deterrent and threatening policy to one which is enabling and empowering of local educators. Document analysis, observations, and

interviews of Massachusetts state education administrators, local district administrators and underperforming school educators were used to gain an understanding of how the state and local levels perceive one another during intervention. Results from the qualitative study were analyzed using Scheberle's (1997) "Working Relationship Typology" which uses trust and involvement levels as variables to determine the type of working relationship between organizations. Findings indicate that the working relationship between the SDE and the school improves during the beginning of intervention, but remains distant. The surprising finding is that the district is seen as the key lever for improvement by those in the underperforming school and SDE. The existing relationship between the district and school, however, was negative, as the elementary school educators blamed the district for neglecting their schools. Giving the district capacity to facilitate school improvement, the SDE designed a system of early intervention that places a "fixer" (Bardach, 1977) at the district level whose sole purpose is to work with underperforming schools. The findings indicate that this contributed to dramatic improvement in the working relationship between the district and the underperforming school as well as the relationship between the SDE and the district.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF FIGURES

ABBREVIATIONS

BOE	Massachusetts State Board of Education
DOE	Massachusetts Department of Education
MCAS	Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System
MERA	Massachusetts Education Reform Act, 1993
NCLB	No Child Left Behind Act, 2001
PIM	Performance Improvement Mapping
SDE	State Department of Education
Specialist	School support specialist

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In 2001, during the first round of Massachusetts Department of Education reviews of potentially underperforming schools, I participated as a monitor/evaluator of the process. It was the first time the schools and the Department of Education had met under the state mandated new school accountability policy, which was part of a comprehensive state education reform legislation passed in 1993. I volunteered to be a monitor on the visits because I was interested in school accountability policy, and how the Department of Education would approach its responsibility to intervene in underperforming schools. The experience of these pilot reviews that would become the *School Panel Review* visits has stayed fresh in my mind; because I began to wonder what impact these visits really have on the local school, and how the Department of Education would be able to manage the support of all of the potentially underperforming schools within the state.

During these visits, principals discussed how the state review had been all over the local newspapers and the school had become a "bad word" within the local education system and the community. At another visit the principal and staff nearly thanked the review panelists and were looking forward to the state's help. The dramatically different responses made me curious about what and how this process impacts the state and local education system and leadership decisions within that system.

Since that time, I have been fortunate enough to work on many research projects analyzing aspects of the Massachusetts Education Reform Act, 1993 and through this

research have come to realize that there is a potential for some monumental changes in how public education is delivered. I also realize that Massachusetts is not the only state grappling with these major education reform initiatives. With the onset of the federal *No Child Left Behind Act, 2001* every state in the nation is facing some sort of alteration to its education system. School accountability provides the context to explore the issues that arise as the tectonic plates of public education shift.

As with any reform effort, I can feel and see the pain of change that many feel within the system. Looking at Massachusetts public education, I find myself constantly torn between the long-term intent of improving education for all children in all schools, and the short-term ramifications manifested in confusion and frustration of educators about the state's Massachusetts Education Reform Act, 1993 and later the federal No Child Left Behind Act, 2001. The school accountability system is just one part of comprehensive reform legislation that reflects this struggle. I cannot help but simply wonder: what is good and what is bad about school accountability? Having read the research and editorials about new school accountability, I have sometimes found a "good" or "bad" determination without any middle ground. Naturally, the dearth of middle ground conclusions has made me suspicious.

I can understand that the label of "underperforming" is damaging to a school and a community. I can also understand that the additional resources that come with the label can actually help a struggling school. Whether the response to underperformance is to give up or to unite under a common vision of improvement is an interesting question. It does not take research to guess that different schools will react differently. But to begin to understand how even one school and one state department of education react and

develop a working relationship during new school accountability policy implementation is a beginning step. Perhaps with better understanding, there will be no need to feel torn between the short- and long-term goals or to place the state and the school on opposite sides of the same coin. Perhaps a humane and reasonable process can be developed in the short-term as the school follows the path to the long-term benefits for students.

One thing is for certain. Accountability in public kindergarten through twelfth grade education within the United States is going through a major overhaul because of a combination of state and federal policies. Once primarily focused on a mixture of educational inputs (such as textbooks, library books, teacher training), teachers' professional judgment, and priorities of the local community, accountability in schools and districts is now focused on educational outcomes (student assessment results) and standards determined by the state. Referred to as "new school accountability,"[1] the shift in focus from internal school accountability to external state accountability standards places much of the responsibility for the quality of public education in the hands of the state departments of education (SDE's) and moves the responsibility further away from where it once resided within the local community and ultimately the teacher in the classroom.

Internal accountability within a school is controlled and defined by the principal and professional educators within the school and the classroom. An internal accountability system relies on the professional judgment of teachers to set standards, develop assessments, and measure progress. External accountability is controlled and defined outside of the local school and establishes common learning standards and

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[1] Fuhrman, S. (1999) refers to "New Accountability." This term has been modified and adapted to specifically address the portion of accountability focused upon schools.

assessments and measures the progress of schools towards these standards. External accountability is often thought to be imposed upon the school from the top down, while internal accountability is thought to be a bottom-up approach with the classroom teachers setting the standards as professional educators.

Internal and external accountability are frequently placed on opposite poles and reflect opposite sides of arguments for and against external, state (and federally) imposed, new school accountability systems. The polarization of internal and external accountability is a mistake. Rather, both are elements of a comprehensive accountability system. Without intending to eliminate internal accountability functions entirely, new school accountability policy uses additional, external state standards and measures to improve the overall quality of public education and to ensure that the state's constitutional responsibility for ensuring an adequate education to its citizens is being met.

"New school accountability" is the tool states use to ensure their constitutional responsibility of providing an adequate, free, and public education is accomplished[2]. Derived from Fuhrman's (1999) "new accountability," and applied specifically to the school accountability system, new school accountability policy: 1) links school level accountability measures to outcomes that are wholly or primarily determined from student performance on state standardized tests; 2) uses the school as the unit of measurement; 3) establishes statewide performance standards for schools to meet; 4) has a system of interventions for schools that do not meet the established standards (underperforming schools) that are administered by the SDE; and 5) includes a system of

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[2] Since the passage of the federal *No Child Left Behind Act, 2001* all states are required to implement a new school accountability system to comply with the law. Because the details of the policy are determined by the individual state governments, there is variance in its rigor among states (Hoff, 2002).

sanctions administered by the SDE for schools that persistently do not meet the state standard (chronically underperforming schools).

Direct interaction between the SDE and the underperforming school during the interventions and the sanctions challenges the very organization of the public education system. As Elmore, Abelmann, and Fuhrman (1996) state, "Underlying the new educational accountability is a belief that states should reorient their relations with schools…away from passive, maintenance-oriented oversight to the active creation of incentives for improvements in student learning" (p. 94). Beyond the goal of improving the quality of public education, new school accountability necessitates a new kind of intergovernmental relationship between the state department of education (SDE) and the underperforming school. The working relationship that develops between the SDE and the underperforming school during the beginning of intervention is the vehicle for administering support and developing congruence between the state's external and school's internal accountability systems.

By making it impossible to hide the poor quality of education in a single school, the policy aspires to meet the explicit outcome of ensuring all children are receiving an adequate education. Interestingly, new school accountability policy relies upon a deterrent system (Bardach, 1977), which uses external threats like SDE (external) intervention in an underperforming school as the incentive to conform to the criteria within a policy. Generally, however, an external accountability policy is dependent upon an organization that commands and controls from the top and is contrary to that of a loosely coupled organization (Weick, 1976), which characterizes state public education systems. Moreover, the external threat is imposed, but the underperforming school's

internal accountability system remains untouched and poses a challenge because state school accountability policy will only be effective if it motivates the alignment of the external mandates with the pre-existing internal accountability mechanisms in an underperforming school (O'Day, 2002).

As a policy, new school accountability defines statutory powers of the SDE and the end-goal of improving the delivery of education within underperforming schools, but it does not dictate how improvement is realized. Between the identification and the end goal lies an area that is ambiguous and thus creates a place for the SDE and the underperforming school to negotiate the manner and process of implementation that best serves the existing strengths of the school's internal accountability system and the state' external accountability system – new school accountability.

The alignment of accountability systems creates a middle ground and leaves room to accommodate the unique needs of the specific school, within the constraints of resources and skills of the SDE and school together. Switching from a deterrent to an enabling strategy of implementation during early intervention is necessary to accommodate the limitations of the SDE's capacity. The working relationship between the school and the SDE is the context and the vehicle for communicating the SDE's willingness to negotiate the implementation of policy and to enable the underperforming school and district to take ownership of improvement efforts with some support from the SDE.

Therefore, the SDE and the underperforming school follow the traditional mode of policy implementation identified by Lipsky (1977) and Elmore (1979) in which negotiation occurs at the level of implementation. The SDE and the underperforming

school will negotiate school accountability policy implementation so that it: 1) makes sense for the strengths and weakness within their organizations (Lin, 2000); 2) connects the external and internal accountability mechanisms (O'Day, 2002); and 3) achieves the intended goal of providing adequate educational outcomes. The working relationship between the SDE and the underperforming school is an essential component, which enables the underperforming school and connects the internal and external accountability systems. Without a better understanding of early interventions the transition from a deterrent to an enabling approach is missed, and how the foundation of the bridge between the state external and underperforming school internal accountability mechanisms develops remains unknown.

Conceptual Framework

Understanding the working relationship between the SDE and the underperforming school is important to understanding the effectiveness of policy (Agranoff & Lindsay, 1983; Scheberle, 1997; Seidman, 1980). Together the SDE and the underperforming school are navigating a new relationship within the public education arena. By implicitly switching from a deterrent to an enabling approach, the SDE is attempting to share the responsibility with the underperforming school and to expand its capacity by using the technical expertise existing among the teaching professionals within the underperforming school and district. Understanding the evolution of the working relationship, and its negotiation as the policy is fitted within the context of the two organizations is critical to understanding the effectiveness of early intervention.

To investigate the evolution of this key relationship, I use a "Working Relationship Typology" developed by Scheberle (1997). Scheberle's typology (1997) conceives of categories in which a working relationship is classified in a study of the intergovernmental relationship between the federal Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the state environmental agencies because "…implementation is a complex process and … working relationships make a difference in how implementation unfolds" (p. 11). Lin (2000) sees a context within organizations where "institutional values and needs are continually being reinterpreted" (p. 168), implying that relationships, especially new relationships, are moving targets that are in a constant state of flux. Because the SDE and the underperforming school are developing a new relationship within the new context of new school accountability, it is important to account for the changes within their working relationship over time. For this reason the typology throws a wide net to capture the status of the working relationship at several points during the beginning of intervention (identification, diagnosis, and early technical supportive assistance), to take the temperature of the working relationship between the two organizations.

The typology relies on two variables that are crucial to the development of a relationship: 1) involvement and 2) trust. Involvement is defined as the level of participation between the SDE and the underperforming school within the context of school accountability. The involvement of the SDE with the underperforming school will naturally increase because intervention dictates greater involvement. Trust, on the other hand, is more elusive. For the purposes of this study, trust is the degree to which each party believes the other will cooperate to achieve the end goal of the policy, improving the educational outcomes. I suggest that trust will increase as the deterrent approach is

left behind and the enabling approach is fully understood by those within the underperforming school. It is likely that the SDE and the underperforming school commence their relationship, with low involvement and thus fall within Scheberle's "coming apart with avoidance" or "cooperative but autonomous" categories. As time passes and involvement increases, the manner in which the SDE implements school accountability policy will dictate whether the working relationship with the underperforming school moves into the arena of "coming apart and contentious," "cooperative but autonomous," or "pulling together and synergistic" (Scheberle, 1997).

Regardless of the direction the relationship takes, the SDE is at once more powerful and more vulnerable within this new relationship with the underperforming school. The effectiveness with which the SDE is able to convey its need to share responsibility, use an enabling approach that depends upon the underperforming school's professional expertise, and build a bridge that connects the internal and external accountability system will likely dictate the ethos and level of cooperation between the SDE and the underperforming school. Information about the need for cooperation will be conveyed in the early interactions between the two entities.

This qualitative study relies on the perceptions of state and school actors of one another and about new school accountability policy as well as observations, analysis of documents and history of the policy to tell the story of the implementation process. Using a relationship typology and a review of the literature on trust and involvement, I have developed the following hypotheses.

First, the working relationship between the state and the underperforming school will change as implementation is negotiated between the two entities. By this I mean that

the SDE will use a "bargaining model" of implementation that is reliant on persuasion rather than punishment (Gormley, 1998), to improve educational outcomes within the underperforming school.

Second, due to constraints of skills and resources within the SDE (Fuhrman, Goertz, & Duffy, 2004), the SDE is dependent upon a functioning working relationship with the underperforming school. The SDE's dependence on a positive working relationship with the underperforming school is greater than that of the school because the SDE is ultimately responsible for upholding the state's constitutional responsibility to provide an adequate and free public education through the framework of new school accountability policy. Without the expertise or resources to implement such a comprehensive policy the SDE is reliant upon the skills and resources where they exist in the public education system, with the professional administrators and educators in the districts, schools, and classrooms. Therefore, the SDE is dependent upon the professionals within the underperforming school and must find a way to develop the SDE officials' skills to empower and focus improvement efforts of the staff within the school.

Third, initially, the underperforming school does not recognize the SDE's dependence. With only the deterrent language of the policy as a source of information about new school accountability, educators within the school are likely to feel threatened when their school is declared underperforming. Understanding new school accountability in terms of the juxtaposition of internal versus external accountability systems, the staff within underperforming schools may expect an SDE to take the most extreme measures of intervention and takeover. Because of these presumptions and

expectations within the school, the SDE must make a magnanimous initial gesture to open the possibility of a positive working relationship with the underperforming school.

Last, if the SDE can sincerely communicate a desire to cooperate with the underperforming school, it will improve the working relationship over time. As the working relationship between the SDE and the underperforming school increases in trust and involvement the relationship will become increasingly positive. If this does not occur, the SDE may be forced to implement stronger controls that it is not necessarily properly equipped to implement.

Study Rationale

Critical of research on policy that is primarily focused on the policymaker and policy development, Elmore (1979) describes a process of "backward mapping" when studying policy implementation, which "…assumes that the closer one is to the source of the problem; the greater one's ability to influence it; and the problem-solving ability of complex systems depends not on hierarchical control but on maximizing discretion at the point where the problem is most immediate" (Elmore, 1979, p. 605). Elmore's idea builds on the work of Lipsky (1977), which identifies the indispensable role of the policy implementers and the policy targets as those who must interpret and implement policy. The manner in which the front line workers or street level bureaucrats implement policy within the constraints of values, skills and resources they possess (Maynard Moody & Musheno, 2003), is fundamental to the impact of policy (Lipsky, 1977).

Policy is negotiated throughout its life, from development through implementation. Highlighting the importance of this understanding, Elmore (1979)

writes, "[t]he encounter of street level bureaucrats with program clients is reputed to be the defining moment that actualizes the policy mandate" (p. 188). This element in policy implementation is crucial to the implementation of new school accountability policy. The SDE, lacking the command and control position that is presumed by the deterrent policy, is more accustomed to gathering information and providing inputs while decisions about the delivery of education reside with the districts and schools within the loosely coupled organization of the state public education system.

Negotiating policy implementation with locally governed districts and schools as partners is a middle ground between the hierarchical, controlling implications of new school accountability and the existing and traditional passive, decentralized character of public education systems within the United States. The challenge for the SDE is to communicate the desire and need to negotiate and build a cooperative relationship with the local district and underperforming school and for those in the underperforming school to accept and react to this need.

The study of the beginning of intervention within the implementation of new school accountability policy is important because it provides insight for states new to the requirements of the policy. The beginning of intervention reveals information on how an SDE and school commence their relationship. The early phases of new school accountability are the formative stages when the SDE and the school negotiate the territory between the presumed and actual implementation of the policy. The first face-to-face interaction between the SDE and the underperforming school is the moment when the change in the state's role and responsibility is first acted upon by the SDE and potentially first realized by the school.

The reason for examining the beginning of intervention is to help understand the new context in which the SDE and the underperforming school function. Lin (2000) finds that the context in which policy is being implemented can create varying results. If one applies this idea to new school accountability policy implementation, studying the working relationship is an opportunity to examine the negotiation of policy implementation as it is fitted within the public education system context. The degree to which the SDE is able to translate accountability policy to meet the needs of the underperforming school and the end goal of the policy will have a profound impact on policy outcomes. The environment of conflict surrounding new school accountability policy makes this translation difficult for the SDE, but as Stoker (1991) notes, "The problem is not to eliminate all conflict… but instead to create conditions in which participants are more likely to respond to conflict with cooperation" (p. 50). Stoker (1991) refers to the idea of incentives as motivators of cooperation, but underlying the incentives concept is a foundation of trust within a working relationship. In the public education system, which relies on professional integrity within its internal accountability system, trust is an incentive. A new relationship must be developed with trust and cooperation in mind to effectively produce the incentives for both the SDE and the underperforming school to work together.

Additionally, the study has many interrelated purposes that may be of value to those outside of the realm of public education. First, it is an examination of intergovernmental relations between a state agency, the state department of education (SDE), contractors, and a local agency, the underperforming school and district.

Second, it is an investigation into how agents of the state (SDE) use what Lipsky (1977) and Elmore (1979) call "discretion" in policy implementation. The SDE will likely need to utilize discretion to meet the end goal of the policy, which presumes a command and control style of organization within the state's public education system. In reality the public education system is loosely coupled and is not conducive to a command and control style of management. Therefore, to achieve the end-goals of the policy, implementation must include elements of negotiation and bargaining between state and local agencies.

Third, it is an examination of the policy implementation process. Taking Lipsky's (1977) idea of "street level bureaucrats" using discretion at the front line of implementation, the study looks at how negotiation and discretion are used to negotiate between the state and "street level bureaucrats," (a.k.a. those in the underperforming school). Early intervention and implementation are important because it is "…the defining moment that actualizes the policy mandate" (Elmore, 1979, p. 188).

Last, it recognizes what Lin (2000) found in her study of policy implementation, namely that the unique context for implementation matters. Specifically because the typical relationship between an SDE and the local district and school consists of low levels of involvement and probably low levels of trust, jumping from the passive, locally driven organization of the public education system to the centralized control of the SDE is unlikely. The context of the public education system from that presumed in the policy makes implementation difficult to imagine. To accommodate the difference between policy and the organization of the education system, someone or some organization must play the role of "fixer" (Bardach, 1977) as policy implementation is negotiated. The SDE

is in the position to play this role with the underperforming school through the development of a positive working relationship.

Truly improving the educational outcomes of schools is important, and the SDE is at once more powerful and more vulnerable within its new relationship with the underperforming school. The effectiveness with which the SDE is able to convey this dependency and need for cooperation will likely dictate the ethos and level of cooperation between the SDE and the underperforming school. As Stoker (1991) writes, "[cooperation] is limited and dependent upon the uncertain and undependable inclinations of implementation partners" (p. 15).

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review lays the groundwork for examining the implementation of the beginning of intervention as new school accountability policy is implemented. An important facet of the examination is the challenges the SDE and the underperforming school face, including a lack of pre-existing relationship, limitations in capacity, and alignment and link between the state's external accountability with the school's internal accountability system. The SDE and the underperforming school are forming a new relationship and a new context during implementation of new school accountability. The negotiation of a relationship within the new context is the focus of this study. The negotiation is examined by combining three bodies of research. First, I examine the available research on new school accountability policy, and how this study fits into that body of research. Second, I look at policy implementation theory and research as it relates to the point of implementation, and how policy is negotiated and fitted to a particular organization. Last, I consider working relationships and the importance of trust and involvement to cooperative relationships. Together these three areas of new school accountability, policy implementation, and working relationships provide a rich foundation for the examination of the beginning of intervention during the implementation of new school accountability policy.

The relationship that develops between the SDE and the underperforming school is new to the educational policy arena and clearly has a heavy burden. A neutral or positive working relationship between the SDE and the underperforming school can simultaneously expand the capacity of both organizations, provide a bridge between the external and internal accountability mechanisms, and change the perception of new school accountability policy from a deterrent system to that of an enabling system of implementation. By applying a framework of working relationships found in research on intergovernmental relations, the discussion is informed and questions specific to the study of new school accountability arise.

After federal and state legislators pass new school accountability laws, and after the state board of education and the department of education officials develop the regulations, all that is left is to implement new school accountability policy. From a linear and hierarchical perspective, it may just be that simple. However, a closer examination of policy implementation reveals that the tensions and negotiations during implementation of a policy can change the impact of a policy or the very policy itself. Implementation is when the divide between the external policymaker's perspective and the actual internal organization of the targets of policy is bridged. As Elmore (1979) suggests, the moment when policy meets is target is the point "where the action is" (Goffman, 1967).

In fact, while negotiating the external policy arena into the internal organization during implementation, a policy can be dramatically altered and the original intent of the policy transformed (Lipsky, 1977; Elmore, 1979; Lin, 2000). It is particularly true in the case of policies targeted at the public education system because of limitations in

resources allocated for implementation and limitations in existing capacity, often "state and federal school policies are stated intentions, not school practices" (Cuban, 2004, p. 112). Elmore (1979), building on the work of Lipsky (1977), emphasizes implementation as another important part of a policy cycle in which policy is negotiated and accommodated between the implementer and the target of the policy. Bardach (1977) identifies a role of "fixer" which facilitates the negotiations and accommodations during implementation and Lin (2000) suggests that the "fixer" bridges the worlds of the external policy maker and the internal targets of policy.

Like most policy implementation cycles, when new school accountability policy reaches the underperforming school during the beginning of intervention, the hard work of connecting the external accountability system to the internal accountability system begins. The working relationship between the SDE and the underperforming school is the vehicle for connecting, negotiating, and making sense of new school accountability policy so that it fits within the context of the individual underperforming school. The challenges of implementing any policy are many. A challenge specific to implementing new school accountability is that public school systems within the United States are not organized to function in a system that is over reliant upon an external accountability system which is the measure for determining schools underperforming (O'Day, 2002).

State public education systems are loosely coupled (Weick, 1976) or fragmented organizations characterized by decentralized decision-making at the level of the client (students), and some degree of ambiguous (school) organizational goals and values (Bush, 1995). Educator expertise is at the bottom of the hierarchy, where it is closest to the students, in the classrooms. Imposing an external accountability system upon a

highly developed, professionally controlled, internal accountability system shakes up the premise of how schools function within the United States.

A loosely coupled organization is characterized as an organization that relies heavily on professional integrity and expertise (Weick, 1976). Self-regulation and accountability for educational outcomes is a hallmark of the teaching profession and, in sum, comprises a school's internal accountability system. Not surprisingly, the ability and the manner with which teachers implement policy have profound influence on the impact of policy in action (Fullan, 1991; Quartz, 1995). Therefore, to be truly effective within public education a system of accountability must have the flexibility to bridge, to negotiate, and to align the state's outcome based, external accountability system (new school accountability) with the school's own internal accountability system (O'Day, 2002).

Negotiation and "making sense" (Weick, 2001) of policy is an inherent part of the policy cycle. Tension between the externally imposed and pre-existing internal accountability systems, which is present during implementation of new school accountability policy, is the context for the negotiation of the policy. With the SDE as the implementer and the school as the target of the policy, the study of the beginning of SDE intervention in the underperforming schools gains in importance because the interaction between the two becomes the foundation of their working relationship. The relationship between the SDE and the underperforming school is the instrument for negotiating the implementation of policy so that it fits the unique strengths and weaknesses of the underperforming school. The working relationship is also the bridge that can connect the external to the internal accountability systems.

The Beginning of Intervention

When the SDE first intervenes in the underperforming school, it engages in the first critical point of negotiation of new school accountability policy implementation. These first meetings are referred to as "the beginning of intervention." The beginning of intervention is when a school meets the performance and strategic criteria and is found to be potentially underperforming, and once a school is found to be underperforming, transitions to the diagnostic intervention that includes the first round of state provided technical assistance and support (Table 2.1). If policy is truly negotiated during implementation, then new school accountability policy's initial and formative negotiations occur during the "early intervention" period. First impressions are lasting and because the SDE and the school have virtually no relationship prior to the beginning of intervention, these first interactions are highly influential to and become the foundation of their working relationship. Negotiation of the working relationship and the resulting new context created by new school accountability policy are the backbone of this research.

The new working relationship developing between the SDE and the underperforming school faces many challenges. First, there is rarely any pre-existing, direct, personal relationship between the two organizations. Up until the point of identification of the underperforming school, the relationship has largely been filtered through the district. Before intervention, the essence of the relationship between the SDE and the school is based on administration, collection of information, and disbursement of funds, and the district is the SDE's conduit for any needs or requirements for information from the schools. The school functions within the local district, which is locally

controlled and relatively autonomous. To increase the involvement between the SDE and the school is seen as intervention and interference in the locally controlled district. Therefore, the SDE and the underperforming school are starting their relationship from scratch, since SDE's generally directly interact with districts, not schools.

Second, as an organization the SDE has skills to collect information, and ensure programmatic compliance, but is not skilled in the business of running schools. Limited capacity within the SDE (Fuhrman & Elmore, 1990; Madsen, 1994, Lusi 1997, McDermott, Berger, Bowles, Brooks, Churchill & Effrat, 2001; Fuhrman, Goertz, & Duffy, 2004; Cuban, 2004) makes the role of new school accountability policy ambassador to the school a difficult proposition.

Third, there is no single prescription for improving the educational outcomes of schools (Fullan, 2001). Improvement efforts must be determined on a school-by-school basis and much of the school improvement literature is based on the strength of internal school accountability systems (e.g., Fullan, 2001; Wagner, 1994). A customized approach costs money, takes time, and requires leadership and expertise, all of which place added strain upon the limited resources within the SDE.

Finally, the undercurrent of new school accountability as a policy is based on what Bardach (1977) calls a "system of deterrence," which relies on the threat of sanctions to motivate targets to comply with policy mandates. Herein lies the reason implementation of new school accountability policy is particularly interesting because its "might" is only felt by a handful of schools[1]. Though the target of new school accountability policy is technically all schools within a state, the only schools that will be

[1] This is particularly referring to the number of schools that are intervened in by the state. Under the *No Child Left Behind Act*, many schools are found to be underperforming, but do not require the state to intervene until later in the accountability process.

intervened in by the SDE are those that are found to be underperforming, generally a smaller population of schools.

The threat of intervention in the deterrent system found within the policy is enough motivation or incentive for most schools, because most schools will satisfy the minimum threshold of state and federal standards, and thus will never actually feel the intervening hand of the state (SDE) or the incremental shift of control away from local boards to the state. For the schools that are found to be underperforming, under a deterrent system the initial threat is over, and to continue on a deterrent system of implementation requires tight controls over actions and standardized implementation methods, which requires resources and capacity to maintain control (Bardach, 1977). SDE's do not have the ability to implement such a system due to limited resources, skills and capacity. Without the capacity for the SDE to be highly involved in the underperforming school (Mintrop, 2003) as required for effective deterrent systems of implementation, the SDE needs to change its strategy. The SDE then falls back upon a strategy traditionally found in U.S. public education systems. This strategy is what Bardach (1977) calls an "enabling" strategy, which is characterized by "high consensus on … goals" and "is buttressed by a common professional identity or commitment…" (p. 113).

A shift in approach during implementation poses a challenge for the SDE and for the underperforming school. Switching approaches requires a change in the understanding of new school accountability policy for those in the SDE as well as those in the underperforming school. Negotiations during implementation are the opportunity for the change in perceptions to occur and the effectiveness of communicating the

necessary change is largely determined by the type and quality of the working relationship between the SDE and the underperforming school.

The initial threats embedded in the new school accountability policy may initially undermine or impede the ability of the SDE and the underperforming school to form a positive working relationship. Because of the limited capacity of the SDE, it is the SDE that will first recognize the need for a change in strategy, and will therefore need to work to change the local educators' perceptions of new school accountability policy. In short, the SDE and the underperforming school must forge a new working relationship which is made more difficult because of: 1) the limited capacity of the SDE, 2) the local hostility and resentment toward the policy's threatening nature, and 3) the general disregard for the profession of education that educators perceive to be embedded in new school accountability policy. Tension created by the shift from a deterrent to an enabling system produces a dynamic in which the SDE has power over the underperforming school, but at the same time the SDE needs the cooperation of those in the school because of limited capacity. The complexity of the relationship adds to the challenges inherent in creating a positive working relationship between the two organizations.

New School Accountability Policy

To investigate the working relationship between the SDE and the underperforming school, it is necessary to take a closer look at a framework for new school accountability. After scanning states through literature reviews and phone interviews, Bowles, Churchill, Effrat, and McDermott (2002) found that states follow a similar framework for accountability systems (see Table 2.1).

Table 2.1: New School Accountability Framework[2]

PHASE	EXPLANATION
Performance criteria	These are used as a gauge to measure and rate schools. Generally student assessments are at the center of these criteria with some additional factors such as attendance rates might be used.
Strategic criteria	These are developed by an SDE to make determinations about school performance and improvement and to identify schools that may need further supports.
Diagnostic intervention	This is the process of determining the reasons for low performance of a school. The diagnostic intervention influences the direction of the corrective intervention by identifying targets and tactics based on the strengths and weaknesses within the local context of the school
Corrective Intervention	This is determined by the capacity of the state to support, hire consultants, or facilitate school improvement. Depending on the type of intervention and processes the state identifies:
Target(s)	The targets of intervention may be practices (e.g., instructional practices), people (e.g., educators), or organizational structures (e.g., school governance, shared leadership) depending on the corrective intervention and strategy.
Tactic(s)	These are the strategies used for the intervention.
Exit Criteria	These are the criteria a state uses to judge whether a school has sufficiently improved and is able to function independently.

(Bowles, et. al., 2002)

The common components of school accountability systems found in Table 2.1 define a process of identification, diagnosis and intervention aimed at improving an underperforming school. From the point of the performance criteria to strategic criteria, new school accountability policy is still perceived as a deterrent system that in theory means the threats of intervention are motivators for school improvement. Once the school is notified that it will be intervened in by the state, the working relationship between the SDE and the underperforming school commences and the diagnostic and corrective interventions become the first interactions between the two. If a school does not improve after the mild interventions, or does not meet the established exit criteria, a

[2] Once a school is declared underperforming, the levels of intervention may be revisited if the initial corrective intervention does not yield improved educational outcomes. An underperforming school, therefore, may go through several iterations of diagnostic and corrective interventions until improvement is evident. The level of the corrective intervention is dependent on the length of time a school is found to be underperforming and the degree to which a school responds to the initial interventions. I propose that the initial meeting of the SDE and the underperforming school and the subsequent working relationship developed is of great value because it sets the tone and incentive for further cooperation.

state may revisit the diagnositic criteria, alter the corrective intervention, and take stronger intervention measures.

Increases in levels of intervention require stronger and different diagnostic and corrective interventions. Under new school accountability policy Brady (2003) identifies three categories of state corrective interventions or threats of intervention: mild, moderate, and strong. Mild interventions have the least impact on the staff and structure of the school and include site visits, diagnosis of school problems, and additional supports such as technical assistance and professional development. Moderate interventions tend to impact the infrastructure or organization of the school and staff. These types of changes are fraught with challenges because they impact school leadership, unions, staff, and the local community, and therefore, require more intense negotiation between these entities and the state. Because of these challenges and the increased intensity of the interventions, moderate interventions tend to require more resources including: time, commitment, skills, and funding. The last level is strong intervention, characterized by loss of local control, such as reconstitution, which can entail anything from the firing of some or all staff, and the hiring of new staff (with an opportunity for former employees to reapply for their jobs), to school take over by the government or some other public or private entity, to school closure. A summary of the "graduated" typology of school accountability intervention is found in Table 2.2.

Interventions are not only typified by the level of resources necessary to implement them, but according to Brady (2003), they reflect an increasing element of political risk for policymakers, which, in turn, creates a higher stress situation for the SDE implementing new school accountability policy. Visible risk in any intervention

will likely grow with stronger intervention. However, the threat those in the educational community feel toward any (mild, moderate, or strong) state intervention should not be treated lightly. Any intervention by the state into the local school has risk because it threatens the autonomy of the school and the teaching profession whether the risk is seen publicly or remains just below the surface.

Table 2.2: School Accountability – Levels of Intervention in Underperforming Schools[3]

Level	Characteristics	Examples
Mild	Outside directed support that does not directly impact the local school structure or make-up, but that may encourage improved skills of leaders and staff aimed at improving the delivery of education. Alterations to the school are internally determined and driven, though the strategies may be prescribed by an external agent (state). Resources required are minimal.	▪ Diagnosis through data-driven analysis of student test scores ▪ Improvement planning that is data-driven ▪ Technical assistance ▪ Professional development
Moderate[4]	Impact to the infrastructure of the school and organization. This requires a more hands-on approach from an external agent. These changes may be arrived at collaboratively by the school staff and state. This type of intervention requires more resources than the mild intervention and conflict with local community is greater because loss of control of the school is evident within some of these strategies.	▪ Added school time ▪ Reorganization of the school ▪ Revisions of curriculum
Strong	Complete or nearly complete loss of local control. Only applied when early interventions have heeded no results. This requires the greatest level of state resources and is extremely controversial in the local community.	▪ Replacement of the Principal ▪ School reconstitution ▪ School take over ▪ School closure

Interestingly, in the early phases of mild intervention, the implementation process is predicated upon the cooperation of the SDE and the underperforming school. The need for cooperation signals that there is potential conflict and is therefore an indication of the change or conflict that arises when the SDE moves from a deterrent to an enabling strategy during early intervention. The "beginning of intervention" includes the strategic

[3] The information for this table is from Brady (2003).
[4] Brady (2003) suggests that removal of the principal is a moderate intervention. In this analysis the firing of any staff, including the principal is considered a strong intervention.

and diagnostic phases, when the SDE and the underperforming school first come face-to-face during the mild level of diagnostic/corrective intervention. During this time there are implicit and explicit changes in strategy the SDE and the school take as new school accountability policy is implemented. The change and negotiation occurs within the context of their new working relationship.

Research on new school accountability policy tends to fall into four categories: 1) research on the impact upon all schools; 2) research on strong interventions into schools; 3) research that synthesizes theory to create a theoretical framework for studying new school accountability; and 4) research on the perspectives and products of early intervention into schools. Each category brings forth interesting issues and perspectives for the beginning of intervention. However, none focus particularly on the formative stages of intervention in conjunction with the working relationship that develops between the SDE and the underperforming school.

The first type of research looks at new school accountability policy and its impact on all schools (e.g., Goertz, Duffy, & Le Floch, 2001; Hanushek, & Raymond, 2002). Generally, the research is concentrated on how policy impacts all schools within a state or looks at the perspective of certain stakeholders (e.g., principals, teachers) across a state (e.g., Goertz, Massell, & Chun, 1998; Ladd, & Zelli, 2002; Mathers & King, 2001). These studies are interesting because they put the voices of all of those who broadly feel the threat of and are impacted by new school accountability policy into the forefront. The challenge with these kinds of studies is that they examine a larger population of schools or stakeholders and provide generalizations about new school accountability policy. The

bulk of the stakeholders, however, will only experience the deterrent nature of the policy and will never experience SDE intervention.

New school accountability is a deterrent policy that uses threat of state intervention to motivate school improvement. Though the risk of state intervention is real, the majority of schools will never feel the ramifications of state intervention. In fact, during the 2000-2001 academic year there were 90,640 public schools in the United States (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2002) and as of 2001, approximately 8,600 schools had been identified as underperforming[5] (Brady, 2003). Less than 10% of the schools within the United States were underperforming. Since the passage of the federal *No Child Left Behind Act, 2001* (NCLB), however, many more schools are likely designated as "in need of improvement" (a.k.a. underperforming), yet the limited capacity of the SDE to intervene in large numbers of schools hinders the level of state intervention and may even lessen the ability for the SDE to help a school.

Due to limitations in state capacity and resources to hold schools accountable, the SDE's use strategic criteria to select a small number of schools out of the many that may be labeled in need of improvement or that are identified for state intervention. The SDE tends to intervene in the worst of the worse schools (e.g., Massachusetts, Maryland). The intent of new school accountability policy is to raise the educational outcomes in all schools, and thus a major focus is placed on the schools that are performing at the lowest levels.

Consequently, new school accountability policy is put to the test when the SDE intervenes in the small population of underperforming schools. The principals and

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[5] Based on the information on underperforming schools, it is not clear that this number is from the same academic year as the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) data.

teachers in these schools truly experience the threat of the policy and once the initial threat is gone, must develop a theory of action with the SDE. It is these stakeholders who provide the most insight into the impact of new school accountability policy. By concentrating on the stakeholders at large, the small number of voices of those who experience intervention is diluted by a majority of stakeholders, who will never experience anything more than a threat of intervention.

A second type of research conducted on new school accountability policy converges upon the strongest interventions (e.g., Coburn & Riley, 2000; Erlichson, Goertz, & Turnbull, 1999; Lynn & Dreeben, 1999; Malen, Croninger, Redmund, & Muncey, 1999; Seder, 2000; Wong, Anagnostopoulos, Rutledge, & Shen, 1999). When a school is determined to be chronically underperforming despite mild and moderate interventions, the drastic and politically risky move of school take over or reconstitution is imposed by an external entity (e.g., state board of education, city mayor). The value of this research is the insight it provides in understanding the impact of a policy, and the strategies that are effective or not effective when implementing policy. The early relationship between the SDE and the underperforming school, which is predicated on mild supportive interventions, such as coaching and training of school personnel, however, is less understood (Mintrop, 2004).

The findings of research conducted on strong interventions indicate that outside intervention leads to limited school improvement because it simply does not impact the "technical core" of the school, the teacher in the classroom. Until the external interveners are able to impose external accountability measures that link to and refocus the internal accountability mechanisms developed by professional educators within the school, strong

interventions will continue to achieve less than desirable educational outcomes. Arguably, at the point of take over or reconstitution the milder interventions have failed, thus the motivation (threat of stronger intervention) of new school accountability is gone and the policy, having lost its deterrent incentives, has failed. If strong intervention means the policy has failed, then it is not surprising that the findings of research on the strongest interventions into schools conclude that school improvement is not fully realized under these circumstances.

A third type of research is the theoretical examination of new school accountability (e.g., Bowles, Churchill, Effrat, & McDermott, 2002; Brady, 2003; Goertz, 2001; Fuhrman, Goertz, & Duffy, 2004; O'Day, 2004). From these examinations one gains insight into the dynamics and context of schools, principals, and teachers and the weaknesses and strengths of a state driven accountability system imposed upon the underperforming school. The results of these analyses provide information on what is important to consider when implementing new school accountability policy by synthesizing existing literature on the organization of schools, school change, and school improvement. It lends a theoretical framework for examining what each stakeholder in the process is dealing with as they are faced with the possibility of state intervention. The studies serve the important purpose of providing implementers and targets of policy with a better understanding of one another, and the facets of policy implementation that may need to be modified or prioritized to achieve positive results.

The limitation of such research is that it does not study new school accountability in the context of implementation. The existing bodies of research on school improvement are valuable, but generally do not approach school improvement in the context of an

externally mandated accountability system. The important work of connecting the external and internal accountability systems is new territory for an SDE or a city mayor. Therefore, synthesizing existing information may lead to conclusions that new school accountability policy does not work because the policy has a top down, deterrent nature, which precludes the idea that real school change and improvement comes from the bottom-up, or at least from within the school (Fullan, 2001).

Herein lies the challenge of new school accountability policy. It is understood and perceived as a deterrent, top down policy by educational stakeholders. However, limited resources require the SDE to partner with the most egregiously underperforming schools during the beginning of intervention in an attempt to avoid the need for stronger interventions, which the SDE has even less capacity to implement. This calls for a shift in implementation style that moves away from deterrence. The SDE is more likely to need the cooperation of the underperforming school to avoid the strong interventions, and thus the two have a common goal. They both want to evade strong intervention. To accomplish such a goal they must partner, collaborate, and cooperate (McRobbie, 1998) to appease state level policy makers and affect improved educational outcomes.

The fourth type of research is conducted specifically on underperforming schools that are being intervened in by the state (e.g., Mintrop & MacLellan, 2002; Mintrop, MacLellan, Quintero, & Keleman, 1999). These studies examine the design and process of implementation and the perceptions of the school stakeholders towards that process. In just such a study, Mintrop and MacLellan (2002) found that new school accountability systems have a "penetrating power…in eliciting obligations to external demands and in shaping managerial models of change and their limitations in bringing forth broadly

based internal development" (p. 297). However, the research tends to focus on the experience of those within the underperforming schools and their reaction to and the products of intervention.

Within this body of literature there is a gap. Specifically, the perspective of the SDE or the external entity and their challenges and struggles with implementing the policy and intervening in the underperforming school are missed. How the SDE manages intervention into underperforming schools and how stakeholders at the state as well as the local levels perceive the policy and its implementation are not well understood. To neglect the role of the state during intervention is to miss an important component of new school accountability policy. How the SDE perceives its role in and negotiates the implementation of new school accountability policy is important because it directly impacts the reaction and perceptions of those within the underperforming school.

Still, the findings from this research on underperforming schools provide some initial insights into local stakeholder perceptions of new school accountability policy and interventions. Shedding light onto new school accountability policy's limitations Mintrop, MacLellan, Quintero, and Kelemen (1999) examined schools that were in the earlier stages of implementation under new school accountability type policies and found that the degree to which the school could internalize the external accountability demands, and the provision of a change agent responsible for bridging the divide between the external and internal accountability mechanisms, were key elements of new school accountability systems, an idea which is supported by the theoretical work of O'Day (2002). A major part of early intervention is centered on the development of school improvement plans by the school. Mintrop, et al. (1999) found that development of the

school improvement plan is an "exercise in shoring up external legitimacy" (p. 58). Consequently, the opportunity to internalize and customize improvement strategies for a specific school is lost or weakened because educators are focused on proving their own worth to the state or external entity. If the exercise of developing the school improvement plan is indeed more for external legitimacy than internal change (Mintrop, et al., 1999), then the role of an external agent to help to bridge the external/internal accountability divide is critical. The SDE is in the unique position to be a bridge that connects the two.

This study of the beginning of intervention attempts to fill the gap in understanding of how state and local entities perceive the beginning of intervention. Therefore it fits most neatly into the fourth category of research on new school accountability policy, though it is informed by all categories of school accountability research. From the first broad research, the idea that new school accountability policy is perceived by stakeholders in a state as "threatening," is recognized, and from the second body of research on strong interventions one gleans that this level of intervention leads to a giving up and dismantling of any internal accountability system within the school. The beginning of intervention is an attempt to capture the experience of individuals after the threat and before the failure (strong interventions) of new school accountability policy. The third category of theory based research on school accountability policy reveals the challenges the SDE and the underperforming schools face when implementing the policy. The strongest point made by these studies is that bridging the externally imposed with the internally pre-existing accountability systems within the underperforming school is essential. This idea implies that deterrence and top down, externally mandated change

will not occur in the face of the SDE's limited capacity, local control, and the tradition of professionalism among educators in the public schools. Each of these entities play an important role in accountability, and the recognition and relationship that develops from the beginning of intervention is the bridge between the state's external and the school's internal accountability systems.

As a contribution to the fourth body of research focused specifically on underperforming schools, this study builds on the idea that the implementation of new school accountability policy is multifaceted (Mintrop, et. al, 2002). There is a role for all of the parties and the "shared conceptualization of school improvement and accountability among state officials who compose the design and the districts and schools who interpret it," (Mintrop, et. al., 1999, p. 60) are critical to meeting the end goal of improved educational outcomes. Though new school accountability policy may seem like a policy that is linear and rationale and leads to a "cause and effect" relationship, the most important finding of such research is that it is "a whole complex of interactions" (Mintrop, et. al, 1999, p. 60) between the state and local levels. The working relationship between the levels of government within a state's public education system is an important, if not the most important, facet of new school accountability policy implementation. Together state and local educators are forming a relationship and a theory of action. Understanding the perceptions of those in the SDE and the underperforming school during the beginning of intervention gets closest to where the action is, and the strategies that support school improvement.

Policy Implementation

Negotiation and adjustment of policy to local conditions are a fundamental and essential part of implementation because they are how the external/internal divide is bridged. As Cuban (2004) writes, "State and federal school policies are stated intentions" (p. 112), and more importantly "few policies are implemented as intended" (p. 113). Negotiation and adjustment during implementation is expected. Limitations of capacity and resources lead to deviations and make negotiations an inherent part of the policy implementation process. Accepting the inevitability of deviations from planned policy, other research (e.g., Elmore, 1979; Lin, 2000; Stoker, 1999) follows policy as it is being implemented and examines the process as it is negotiated at all levels with particular focus upon the implementer and the target of policy. Thus the study of new school accountability takes the perspective that there is a natural and an inevitable negotiation during implementation that occurs (Lipsky, 1977; Elmore, 1979; Maynard Moody & Musheno, 2003).

Acceptance of deviations and negotiations during implementation points to the idea that the context in which policy is being implemented makes a difference (Lin, 2000). However, the results after policy implementation inevitably will be varied. Lin (2000) challenges the underlying assumption within many policy implementation theories (e.g., Mazmanian & Sabatier, 1981; Pressman & Wildavsky, 1979) that suggest policy goes awry during implementation. Rather than hijacking a policy, Lin suggests that the implementers and targets are merely trying to "make sense" (Weick, 2001) of policy within their own context. In an expression of a more sympathetic view Lin states,

> …any group of staff and participants cannot be expected to administer, carry out, or participate in any set of activities unless

> those activities serve some purpose in their understanding of the work or life tasks they believe they must do, or unless those activities make their lives easier.
>
> (Lin, 2000, pp. 45-46)

This point of view of a policy allows for an understanding of the perspectives of the targets and the implementers. Lin (2000) sheds light on the contextual factors that may lead to different outcomes, by investigating and incorporating contextual differences into the understanding of how policy is implemented.

Implementation choices must be matched to the type of organization in which a policy is being applied. In a tightly bound and controlled organization, using force and control as the method of implementation might make sense; however, in a loosely coupled organization, the effort and resources necessary to implement policy in this manner is draining and ill-fitting. "Standardized solutions developed at great distance from the problem, are notoriously unreliable" (Elmore, 1979, p. 610), and in any loosely structured organization with expertise at the bottom, there must be room for professional discretion and adaptation to unique circumstances. Relationships and communication are more likely a better option for the loosely coupled organization.

Bridge building between the external policy environment and the internal organization of the target is a key element of negotiation. According to Lin (2000), the idea of an implementation "fixer" (Bardach, 1977) is an essential element to implementation when negotiating implementation. Lin's perspective on the fixer role is different than that of Bardach's original conception of the role. Bardach (1977) describes a policymaker as the fixer who treats a policy as her/his pet project and therefore, continues to oversee and monitor as well as fight for resources for policy implementation. Taking a micro perspective, Lin alters the definition slightly by referring to what is more

likely an implementer, rather than the policymaker, who is responsible for translating and negotiating the policy with the target. Making sense of a policy and creating the conditions for congruence within the existing organizational structure creates a new context for implementation the fixer facilitates the process.

Deterrence v. Enabling

> In the simple model of inducements, if society penalizes an activity, people will do it less, and if it rewards an activity, people will do it more. In the polis, things aren't so simple. Inducements are usually designed by one set of people (such as policy analysts, legislators, and regulation writers), applied by another (executive branch bureaucrats), and received by yet a third (individuals, firms, organizations, lower levels of government). The passage from one set to the next is treacherous.
>
> (Stone, 1997, p. 151)

New school accountability is based on penalizing schools that do not improve with the threat of state intervention. From the state legislature, the state boards of education to the SDE's and finally to the underperforming schools and their districts, the way in which the policy is interpreted along the way is altered. Indeed, as Stone states, "passage from one to the next is treacherous." With sanction based policies like new school accountability "[t]he biggest problem is a lack of willingness to impose sanctions… on the part of officials while meting them out" (Stone, 1997, p. 151). The SDE is unwilling or unable to implement sanctions because of capacity limitations and is consequently dependent upon cooperation with the underperforming school. Therefore, the SDE takes an approach that develops a working relationship between the two rather than punishing the underperforming school.

Adding to the treachery, there is a lack of specific guidance or understanding about how states can improve schools. Capacity for the SDE to support and turn around

failing schools is a challenge in nearly all states (Bowles, et.al., 2002, Goertz, et. al, 2001; Mintrop 2003; Olson, 2003). There are no hard and fast rules on what kind of resources or the amount of resources needed to achieve improvement (Fullan, 2001). New school accountability policy relies on the threat of intervention in the hope that it will be motivation enough for schools to improve educational outcomes.

Negotiation during implementation also confronts the stakeholder perceptions about new school accountability policy. The language of new school accountability policy uses threats of mild, moderate, and strong intervention to motivate school improvement at the local level. Research on the impact of new school accountability upon all schools shows that the majority of stakeholders perceive the policy as threatening; however, threats may undermine the working relationship between the SDE and the underperforming school during the beginning of intervention. Thus, part of the negotiation gives rise to the SDE and the underperforming school redefining new school accountability so that it is possible to collaborate and provide support for the improvement of educational outcomes within the underperforming school. I suggest that this requires a negotiation or change in how new school policy is implemented and therefore perceived, from a deterrent to an enabling system of implementation.

Bardach (1977) describes two seemingly opposite modes of implementation: "deterrent" and "enabling." A deterrent system of implementation is one that uses threats of punishment (or disincentives) to motivate targets to comply with policy goals. This type of implementation is often found in situations where uniformity and standardization are primary goals and in situations where professional discretion and adaptation are seen a detrimental to the policy outcomes. Paradoxically, an enabling system of

implementation is different from the popular psychology term which refers to an enabler as someone who supports another person's less than desirable actions. Enabling for these purposes is a more positive term which uses empowerment and consensus to achieve common goals (Bardach, 1977). An enabling system is congruent with negotiating policy implementation, fitting policy into the existing context and relying on professional discretion and adaptation so that policy makes sense for the organization.

The Bardach (1977) description of a system of deterrence is at least partially applicable to new school accountability policy as it is designed by legislators and policymakers within a state. In a deterrent type of system "…the amount of punishment is typically disproportionate to the degree of performance" (p. 120). The inherent motivation within new school accountability policy is for schools to avoid SDE intervention and maintain the status quo of professional and local autonomy. The failure of a system of deterrence, like new school accountability policy, is that it undermines any professional respect, trust, or common goals, which are essential in an enabling system (Bardach, 1977). Additionally, a deterrent system creates an environment that "presumes suspicion and alternative goals" (Bardach, 1977, p. 120). Even worse, a deterrent system is only as good as the threat of punishment. Once an SDE is at a point where it must administer the punishment, the incentive for the underperforming school to improve is negligible, and the professional educators within the targeted school may feel like giving up. The threat is more powerful than the actual punishment.

Stone (1997) finds that the tool of the deterrent system, sanctions may 1) "create conflict between targets and givers;" 2) "harden targets' resistance;" 3) "be sabotaged by givers;" or 4) "hurt the people one is trying to protect instead of altering the behavior of

the targets" (p. 281). None of these outcomes are ideal for the SDE to encounter when working with the underperforming schools and support changing to an enabling system of implementation. Stoker (1989) describes implementation theory as an "authority paradigm," which does not view policy implementation as an evolutionary process, but rather as a process of developing policy and then implementing it as it was intended (e.g., Mazmanian & Sabatier, 1981; Pressman & Wildavsky, 1979). New school accountability appears to be an example of Stoker's authority paradigm, as it is designed to increase the consequences or levels of punishment in a system of deterrence. These levels (mild, moderate, and strong) of punishment may continue the system of deterrence especially for those schools in the earliest phases of underperformance.

Loosely coupled organizations made up of authorities with what Stoker (1989) describes as "diffuse power" can bring about confusion in expectations when a policy demands an implementation style that does not fit the organization. Likewise, the gap between new school accountability policy that presumes a rational, efficient, mechanistic public education system and the reality within the loosely coupled public education system brings about confusion about the expectations the SDE and underperforming school have for one another. Functioning within the limitations of its skills and resources, the SDE is best suited to implement an enabling strategy (Bardach, 1977) or what Gormley (1998) calls a bargaining model of enforcement, which uses the power of persuasion to improve performance, and is less reliant on control and capacity. The ability of the SDE staff to relay the message that they want to work with the school, rather than threaten and control the school, is essential to the implementation of this

strategy. In the context of new school accountability policy, an enabling system is clearly dependent upon trust and cooperation between the SDE and the underperforming school.

Lin (2000) lays out the inherent tension that exists when policy implementation is being negotiated. The tension exists within "the choice between solidarity, force, and control, or instead communication, individual relationships, and flexibility" (p. 47). Interestingly, it is similar to the tension between a deterrent and an enabling approach to implementation. The implementation "choice" between force and control versus communication and relationships comes with capacity issues. By using a persuasive, relationship driven approach, time and effort are needed to commence the relationship, and after it is off to a good start, less time and effort are required. When using force and control as a method of implementation the implementer needs high levels of capacity and resources to maintain the force necessary and ensure compliance to the policy.

An enabling system of implementation allows for the SDE and the underperforming school to work together to fit the policy into the public education system and into the underperforming school by negotiating the imposed external and the valued internal accountability systems so that it makes sense for both. This detail that is critical to understanding how, during the mild intervention level of the diagnostic/corrective intervention phases, the shift in strategy between the SDE and the underperforming school is plausible, and why it may actually be effective.

The gap in perceptions has the potential to lead to extra challenges and miscommunications during the earliest phases of new school accountability. Under new school accountability policy the SDE and the school are required to interact and work together in new ways to improve educational outcomes for students. Working together is

challenged by a lack of relationship between the SDE and the school. In fact, the relationship may be more likely characterized as negative. Cuban (2004) supports this possibility when he describes how the organizations within the public education system tend to act more like rivals than partners. Adding to the rivalry, the deterrent nature of new school accountability policy does not lead one to believe that those in the SDE and the schools will be more disposed to partnering. Consequently, working together is not necessarily the first thing on the minds of those in the school because of the threatening nature of new school accountability policy.

When schools are found to be underperforming, the motivation (threat) has not worked, and the SDE, in a sense, is left "holding the bag" as the organization responsible for guiding, supporting, and making decisions about how to improve an underperforming school. Looking for an answer to questions about how to improve schools, one finds general guidelines for intervention and emphasis upon the idea of taking a customized approach to intervention focused on meeting the needs of the underperforming school (Datnow & Stringfield, 2000; Fullan, 2001). Customization is in direct conflict with the development of a "one best system" (Tyack, 1974) approach to improve schools, which is a type of solution organizations such as SDE's are best structured to implement (Tyack, 1974) and that which new school accountability policy seemingly mandates. Recommendations such as working within the local context along with other general tips for turning around a school do not fit the one best way mold of the SDE and contribute to a lack of information about the effort and resources needed to improve schools.

In truth, SDE's simply do not have the capacity (Mintrop, 2002; Lusi, 1997; Madsen, 1994) to take over large numbers of schools that are not meeting the state

established performance standards primarily based on student test scores (Madsen, 1994; Lusi, 1997; Wirt & Kirst, 1997). Limited state capacity (Mintrop, 2002; Lusi, 1997; Madsen, 1994), increased threats to local leaders in underperforming schools (Mintrop, 2002; Acker-Hocevar & Touchton, 2001), and downward spiraling fiscal situations within states all make it critical for states and local underperforming schools to work together, if they are to reach the end-goal of providing an adequate education to all children within the state (Center on Education Policy, 2003).

The SDE and the underperforming school are dependent upon one another to accomplish the goals of new school accountability policy. Elmore (1979) suggests that the real action is where the policy meets the target and how the policy is negotiated between the two entities. Based on that assertion, it is in the best interest of the SDE and the underperforming school to develop a working relationship that allows room for discretion and bargaining during the implementation process, if they are to be partners. New school accountability policy's external accountability strategy, as it is implemented by the SDE, works only if it is connected to the underperforming school's internal accountability system. The SDE must work, with the help of the school, to make or to build the internal/external connection.

Supporting this idea, Lusi (1997) examined this new role of state education departments and found that, like the internal and external accountability mechanisms of the school, reform must be managed externally as well as internally. She states, "There cannot be a disjunction between the principles and goals of the reform effort and the principles and goals of the [SDE] because one reflects the other…[and] how the [SDE's] themselves function seems to have important implications for the success or failure of

complex reform" (Lusi, 1997, p. 157). One of Lusi's (1997) key findings is that complex reform requires continual policy refining and development as it is implemented or negotiated. "Legislation, no matter how thoughtfully written, cannot possibly foresee all of the problems and challenges that will arise during implementation. It is up to the [SDE], then, as the implementation arm of the state to make the intelligent adjustments needed in the implementation process…" (Lusi, 1997, p. 158). The adjustment and evolution of policy described during implementation makes room for the discretion and bargaining Elmore (1979) refers to during the implementation process.

The SDE, as the new school accountability implementer, must work to "bridge the external/internal divide" (Mintrop & MacLellan, 2002, p. 297), much like the role of the "fixer" described by Lin (2000) and first conceived of by Bardach (1979). Newman, King, and Rigdon (1997) suggest that the greater the degree to which a reform is internalized by those in the school community, the more likely the reform is to be embedded into the school's "internal accountability system," and the better the SDE is at mobilizing and motivating alignment between the internal and external accountability systems, the more likely it is that stronger SDE interventions will be avoided. During the early phases of implementation, the SDE is in the position to build individual relationships within the school and facilitate the internalization of the accountability system. Because those staff working in the school may only understand the threatening nature of new school accountability policy itself, a change in understanding of the new school accountability policy must occur if the SDE and the underperforming school are to engage in an effective working relationship.

The way the policy is perceived prior to intervention may make school staff within underperforming schools feel threatened and undermined professionally (Mintrop, 2002; Acker-Hocevar & Touchton, 2001) and may lead to a throwing up of hands and giving up or handing over responsibility of the school to the state. This is particularly salient because the public education system relies upon the professional standards of administrators and teachers (Meyer & Rowan, 1978; Tyack & Cuban, 1999). By undermining this professionalism within a school, much of the capacity within the school is weakened or lost. If the professionals within a school feel threatened, then the chance of cooperating to bridge the internal and external accountability systems seems unlikely. The SDE must communicate and take actions that reflect an enabling strategy, otherwise, the new school accountability policy remains external to the school, and improvement efforts fall victim to the pitfalls that Bardach (1977) describes in a "system of deterrence."

Working Relationships

As with any policy which requires intergovernmental cooperation, during the early phases of new school accountability two organizations, the SDE and the underperforming school, must work with one another, and, as they do this, they create a new context during policy implementation. The context for implementation may be as complex as the consideration of the values and priorities of each individual within an organization, or as simple as identifying the broad values embedded within an ever changing organization. For this reason it is important to identify a guide or framework

for exploring the working relationship between the SDE and the underperforming school during the implementation of new school accountability policy.

The SDE and the school lack a working relationship history (Madsen, 1994), and they are from different organizational contexts, which bring about a variety of possible glitches in the policy implementation process. They are both beholden to the state; however, the school must also meet the demands of the local school board, parents, and community. The SDE must satisfy the state politicians, governor, and legislators, as well as those in the state board of education. The school is ultimately responsible for implementing the policies, laws, and regulations of the federal, state, and local governments. The SDE is responsible for providing information to inform the laws and regulations, as well as enforcing these same laws. In the end, the SDE, the school, and the district are all working within the public education system, but the constituencies they serve, and the requirements of their positions within the system, make them different. When considering these differences one expects that policy implementation may not be as streamlined as the policymakers might presume.

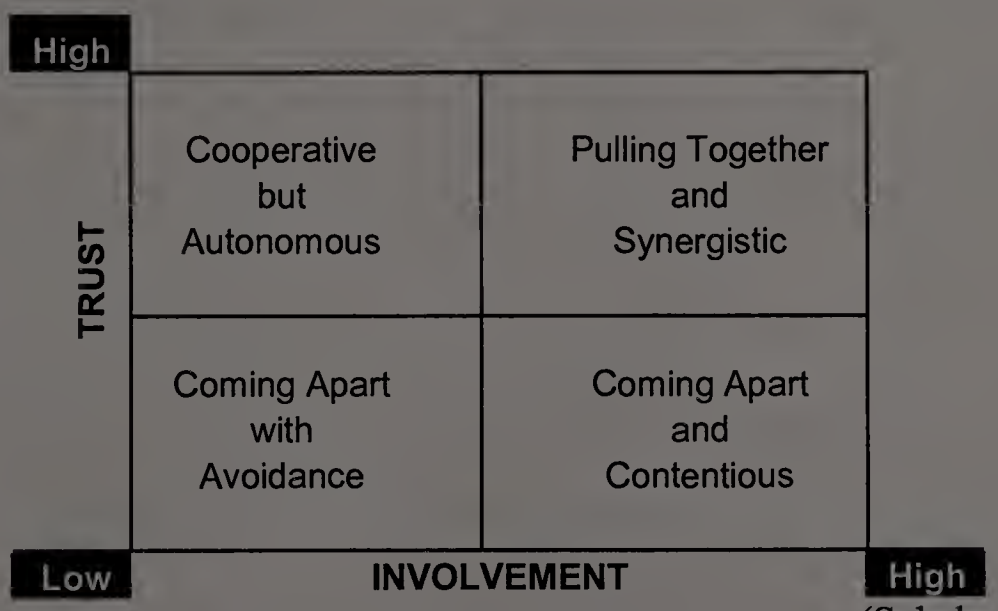
The personal and individual relationships the members of the SDE and the school develop will dictate how policy is negotiated, and whether early intervention successfully avoids the strong interventions and leads to improvements in educational outcomes. Indeed, Lin's (2000) suggestions that solidarity and individual relationships encourage cooperation and internalization of policy mandates, both come into play in the work of Bryk and Schneider (2002), who found that a combination of individual relationships among levels within a school system (e.g., SDE, district and school) as well as the solidarity of interrelationships among groups (e.g., teachers) contribute to the success of

improvement initiatives within a school. The art of balancing and appropriately placing control and individual relationships becomes part of the new school accountability policy context. The perceptions of the SDE implementers and the underperforming school educators will dictate the level of cooperation and type of working relationship they will have with one another. In a study on environmental policy implementation Scheberle (1997) draws the conclusion that relationships among implementers are important to policy outcomes. This finding suggests the ability of the SDE to develop a positive relationship with the underperforming school will have a profound impact on the implementation process.

If working relationships between the SDE and underperforming school affect the policy implementation process, then it is necessary to develop a way to examine these relationships. Scheberle (1997) developed a working relationship typology (Figure 2.1) that is useful for the study of new school accountability policy for several reasons. First, it is based on the study of public agencies (environmental protection agencies) that are working to implement policy that is intended for the public good. Both public education and the environment are public goods. Public education, like the protection of the environment, is difficult to look at in purely economic terms. The long term benefits are difficult to calculate, but are perceived to some degree to be a benefit to society. Hence, public education is an institution of society that has a degree of public faith, priority, and trust, which may not be as prevalent in other organizations. Second, within the public sector the typology is designed to examine the relationship of two distinctly separate, yet dependent organizations that many policymakers may see as naturally cooperative, and therefore, overlook the challenges of cooperation between these organizations. Third, to

understand how these working relationships function, the typology takes into account the negotiation and bargaining that goes on after a policy is developed and places importance on the study of this part of the implementation process. Though a policy may be developed, it is still being honed during implementation, and evidence of this is found in the working relationship between the SDE and underperforming school. Specifically, the staff's perceptions and levels of trust and involvement with one another dictate the type of working relationship they have.

The key elements in the typology are involvement and trust levels within the confines of a particular policy. Because a policy is evolving in meaning as it is implemented (Elmore, 1979), so too are the working relationships between the SDE and the underperforming school as new school accountability policy is being negotiated, bargained, and fitted for this new context.



(Scheberle, 1997, p. 18)

Figure 2.1: A Typology of Federal and State Working Relationships

Scheberle (1997) designed a working relationship typology to examine just such a working relationship (Figure 2.1). In this typology Scheberle (1997) identifies two

essential elements to working relationships, mutual trust and involvement of both partners. Involvement is defined as the interaction between the two entities. Trust is defined by Scheberle as the degree to which the other is dedicated to the "intent of the policy." The variables of involvement and trust are examined after a policy or program has been implemented. In the depiction, involvement and trust are the crucial variables in characterizing a working relationship.

The four types of working relationships Scheberle (1997) identifies are: 1) pulling together and synergistic, 2) cooperative but autonomous, 3) coming apart with avoidance, and 4) coming apart and contentious. "Pulling together and synergistic" is high in trust and involvement between the two entities. According to Scheberle this is the ideal working relationship. It is characterized as a general willingness of both parties to contribute, support, and play an active role in the implementation of policy. A "cooperative but autonomous" relationship is "cooperative, but lonely" (Scheberle, 1997, p. 20). "Coming apart with avoidance" is a relationship that is shallow at best and plagued by mistrust. The "Coming apart and contentious" working relationship is marked by low levels of trust. It requires one of the entities to dominate and relies upon detailed reporting from the other. Missing from this type of relationship is the notion of reciprocity, which leads to negative perceptions about one another. The negative perceptions turn into a vicious, downward spiraling cycle in which one of the two entities must make a move to break the cycle (Scheberle, 1997).

The variables of trust and involvement lead to identification of the type of working relationship that exists using this typology. Taking it a step further, a "motivation attributions model" of trust developed by Murnighan, Malhorta and Weber

(2003) is used to take into account the uneven playing field between two potential partners. By identifying strategies that may increase the likelihood of developing a trusting relationship between two entities such as the SDE and the school, the motivation attributions model provides characteristics to look for during the process of policy implementation and the working relationship negotiation. To examine particular elements of trust, aspects of the motivated attributions model of trust developed by Murnighan, Malhotra and Weber (2003) specifically takes into account the characteristics of: feelings of dependence, sincerity of trusting acts, evaluation of ambiguous information (positively or negatively), perceived likelihood of reciprocity of the other party, risk reducing behaviors to encourage trust, consistent and clear communication.

Involvement

Involvement in simple terms is the level of interaction between two organizations (the SDE and the underperforming school) during policy implementation (the early phases of new school accountability implementation). Scheberle (1997) describes the element of involvement within the working relationship typology as being defined by interaction between two entities within the confines of a specific program or policy. Put in new school accountability terms, involvement is the degree to which the SDE and the underperforming school work with one another. The assumption behind the involvement variable is that the greater the involvement between the two during implementation, will lead to either a cooperative or a micromanaged working relationship. On the other hand, lower levels of involvement between the two will result in a weaker working relationship. By adding the trust variable the integrity of involvement may be affected, this is the basic premise for involvement when considered as part of the working relationship typology.

Because relationships, like implementation and policy making are in a constant state of flux or negotiation, to look at a working relationship at one point in time limits the understanding of the implementation process and the working relationship as it evolves. Since the SDE switches from a deterrent to an enabling approach during the early phases of implementation, it is likely that this relationship will change as the SDE and the underperforming schools interact and discover this change. In fact, past history of involvement can dictate the terms on which the working relationship is functioning (Boon & Holmes, 1991; Lindskold, 1978; Swinth, 1967). Additionally, expectations for future involvement have been found to impact cooperation, and not surprisingly the past relationship has a strong relationship to these expectations (Murnighan, Malhotra, & Weber, 2003). If the past and future expectations can influence a working relationship, then one can take a short leap and surmise that the involvement and interactions during the actual implementation will also impact the working relationship.

Along with the past, present, and future, the duration of the working relationship must be taken into consideration. For example, if a coworker does not particularly like a new consultant, but she knows that the consultant is expected to be working in the office for a long period of time, she may be more likely to cooperate with the consultant than if the consultant's duration at the office were a shorter period of time. Staff members from the schools hold opinions about the state system of education of which they are a part. Just the same, staff in the SDE also hold opinions about schools. While new school accountability policy brings about a new dynamic between the two, it does not negate the understanding among each that they are involved with one another even if they are only loosely coupled. Therefore, there is a long term nature to their relationship, which will

influence the evolution of the working relationship between the SDE and the underperforming school. There is an expectation that the involvement between the SDE and the underperforming school is ongoing; however, the level of involvement between them is more intense during the early intervention portion of new school accountability implementation.

Involvement and trust are not completely separate from one another. For example, if involvement between two parties is positive, or at least not negative, then the history of involvement can increase the likelihood of trust (Boon & Holmes, 1991; Lindskold, 1978; Swinth, 1967). The history of the relationship between the SDE and the school becomes an important factor to understanding from where the two are starting. In fact, the perceptions that the SDE and school have of one another may or may not be based on actual interaction with members of each others organization. Regardless, these perceptions before and during the implementation of new school accountability policy influence the expectations each has for the other. The time dimension of past, present, and future within the involvement variable is particularly important to the working relationship between the SDE and the underperforming school.

Trust

Scheberle (1997) defines the level of mutual trust as the degree to which participants believe others "are dedicated to effectively implementing the policy" (p. 17). Gambetta (1988) identifies trust as a key element of cooperation, and in the typology developed by Scheberle (1997) it is trust that is at the foundation of the working relationship. Fitting this into new school accountability terms, trust is the degree to

which the SDE and the underperforming school believe the other is authentically working to improve educational outcomes within the school.

It is an admittedly oversimplified notion of trust. Buck (1998) suggests that missing from the conceptualization of trust in the Scheberle (1997) study is the idea of reciprocity. In terms of new school accountability policy, reciprocity means the belief that the other (SDE or underperforming school) will come through on promises embedded in the policy (e.g., technical assistance, financial support, political support). Thus, trust must include the concept of self-perception as well as perception of the other as they move through early implementation. A back and forth reflection over time will be more likely to capture the concept of reciprocity within the working relationship between the SDE and the underperforming school.

Volumes of work on trust have attempted to develop the concept of trust and cooperation (e.g., Gambetta, 1988; Luhmann, 1988; Axelrod, 1984; Murnighan, Malhotra, & Weber, 2003; Mayer, Davis, & Schoorman, 1995) signifying that defining and researching trust is a prodigious task and suggesting that the Scheberle (1997) definition may be limited by oversimplification. Still, even a simplistic definition of trust is worthwhile because the importance of the frontline workers relationship, including trust and cooperation, and its impact on policy implementation is paramount to the effect of policy (Lipsky, 1977; Maynard Moody & Musheno, 2003).

Rational models of trust describe incremental acts of trust that grow a trusting relationship; however, there are acts of trust that are not captured by this type of model (Kelley, 1979, Kramer, 1999; Luhmann, 1979; Rempel, Holmes, & Zanna, 1985). The switch from a deterrent to an enabling strategy does not set a solid foundation for

incremental acts of trust over time. Rather, the switch is swift once the threat of being identified as underperforming becomes a reality, and to take an enabling approach is seemingly contradictory (and will likely seem like this to those in the school), to the initial understanding of the policy. Within a short period of time the SDE and school will need to establish the new enabling strategy and begin on a path toward improvement. The rapid change in strategy and differences between the two strategies make it unlikely that a rational, incremental model of trust will fit this policy implementation circumstance, thus the alternative acts of trust may prove a better fit.

"Irrational" acts of trust occur in every day life, and prove to be an exception to the traditional rational models. For example, why would a more dependent person make a decision to trust someone who has more power and authority? It happens all of the time, and beyond the idea of faith, Weber, Malhorta, and Murnighan (2003) seek to redefine the idea that this kind of trust is irrational and call attention that "these acts, rather than being irrational and ineffective, can be crucial to trust development" (Weber, Malhorta, & Murnighan, 2003, Abstract) through what they call the "motivated attributions model of trust."

The motivated attributions model of trust calls attention to characteristics that may be looked for during the implementation of new school accountability policy. This model "portrays the trust development process as one that depends on each party's interpretations of each other's actions and which, as a result, may be far from smooth" (Weber, Malhorta, & Murnighan, 2003, p. 25). This is a natural fit for looking at new school accountability policy implementation because of the change in strategy that occurs after the threat of underperformance becomes real.

The SDE and the underperforming school are in an asymmetrical relationship with the policy implying that the SDE has authority over the school, while in reality the expertise for improving the delivery of education (the end-goal of new school accountability policy) resides within the school (trained, professional educators). So, though the SDE is technically above the underperforming school in the hierarchy of public education, the loosely coupled system of public education means that the connection is not as direct as may be presumed by new school accountability policy. Therefore, though the SDE is considered to have authority over the underperforming school, it is actually more of a negotiated relationship between the two.

Initially, one might assume that the underperforming school is more dependent upon the SDE, but the actual delivery of education occurs at "bottom" of the hierarchy. The expertise for the improvement of education exists at the lowest level of the public education system. The SDE relies upon the professionals at the (so-called) bottom of the hierarchy, and is consequently dependent upon their expertise to improve the delivery of education. A dynamic of one party being more dependent on the other is often found in a relationship and the motivated attributions model proposes characteristics of how a positive working relationship can be developed in just such a situation. Specifically, the model proposes characteristics that motivate trust between two parties when the playing field is less than even.

The model proposes characteristics of mutual trust being dependent upon large acts of trust, which then spur on a mutual trusting relationship. It recognizes each entity's understanding of dependency of themselves and the other party, as well as the impact of self-image and positive reinforcement. Some of the propositions within the

model that are particularly applicable to new school accountability policy implementation follow.

First, when there are two parties involved, the party that is most dependent upon "mutual trust", or perceives the greatest dependency on the other, will be "more motivated and more likely to initiate a trusting act" (Weber, Malhotra, & Murnighan, 2003, p. 12). This is an interesting proposition because there may be some confusion, at least initially, as to who is the more dependent between the SDE and the underperforming school. The school staff may feel as though they have failed, lost control, and feel dependent upon the will of the SDE and/or may feel threatened and defensive toward the SDE during intervention. At the same time the SDE, with limited expertise, resources, and overall capacity may actually be more dependent upon the trust and cooperation of the underperforming school in order for the enabling strategy to work.

Second, "as their dependence increases, potential trustors will... evaluate ambiguous information about the counterpart positively… [and] be more likely to engage in large acts of trust" (Weber, Malhotra, & Murnighan, 2003, p. 14). As the SDE and the underperforming school recognize their dependence upon one another and the switch to an enabling strategy, they begin to expect the other is trustworthy and will reciprocate acts of trust. Again, the more dependent party must initiate and establish this during intervention, and because of the need for cooperation with the school, it will likely be the SDE that will need to take a leap of faith and expect a trusting relationship from the underperforming school.

Third, the perceptions of actions of the other party are essential. Weber, Malhotra, and Murnighan, (2003) call attention to "sincere" as opposed to "calculative"

acts of trust and the perception of the trusting parties with regards to these acts will either increase or decrease the likelihood of reciprocity and eventually developing a positive and trusting relationship between the SDE and the underperforming school.

Fourth, "[p]recipitous trusting acts will accelerate the development of mutual trust" (Weber, Malhotra, & Murnighan, 2003, p. 17). Besides the point that the SDE is more reliant upon cooperation and a level of mutual trust with the underperforming school, the SDE has more experience with implementing new school accountability policy. Therefore, the SDE is in the position to set the tone of the relationship with the underperforming school. If the SDE representatives conduct themselves in a trusting manner from the start, they may accelerate the potential for a positive working relationship.

Fifth, "[r]eciprocity will be more likely when it reinforces a positive self-impression or reduces the likelihood of negative self-impression" (Weber, Malhotra, & Murnighan, 2003, p. 18). This is a key point when looking at the early phases of new school accountability implementation because studies by Acker-Hocevar and Touchton (2001) and Mathers and King (2001) report findings that principals and staff within the underperforming school find the SDE intervention to be threatening and to lower morale within the school. The "underperforming" designation reinforces a negative self-impression. Therefore, for the SDE to gain a functioning level of trust and positive working relationship, then implementation must include strategies that reduce the initially negative self-impression brought about by the policy and the underperforming label.

Last, "[c]lear communication can accelerate explicit understandings of each party's trusting actions and expectations and increase the likelihood of a mutually

beneficial trust development process" (Weber, Malhotra, & Murnighan, 2003, p. 21). Communication is an easy tool that the SDE representatives can use to show their dependence upon the expertise within the underperforming school and to show "precipitous acts of trust" to form the basis of a positive working relationship. This characteristic is supported by the enabling strategy, which entails communication, individual relationships, and flexibility (Lin, 200), and requires a combination of availability, openness, and direct communication between the SDE and the underperforming school. Again, the SDE, having participated in many early interventions, is in the position to train staff and consultants to use this style of communication. Clear lines of communication between the SDE and the underperforming school during the early phases of implementation will facilitate the potential for forming a positive working relationship.

The motivated attributions model of trust is appropriate for analyzing the working relationship between the SDE and the underperforming school for several reasons. While both the SDE and the underperforming school are dependent upon one another for successful implementation, they are not on a level playing field. Initially, it seems (and likely feels this way to school staff) that the underperforming school is in the more vulnerable, and therefore, dependent position. New school accountability policy, however, places greater control (and responsibility) in the hands of the SDE. The lines of authority and responsibility to improve the delivery of education point directly to the SDE, and presumably those in the SDE who ultimately will be held accountable to the policymakers for achieving the end goal. Without the technical expertise or resources to improve education and by employing an enabling strategy relying on the professional

expertise of those within the school, in a sense, the SDE is more dependent upon the school's cooperation than the school is upon the SDE. The SDE technically has the most power at the top of the hierarchy, but is also most vulnerable as the entity that is ultimately accountable for upholding the state constitutional responsibility to ensure the delivery of an adequate education to all students. Consequently, the SDE benefits the most from "mutual trust," follows proposition one of the mutual attribution model, and initially takes the greater risk to launch a trusting relationship.

The remaining propositions of the mutual attributions model ring familiar to the Weick (1979) definition of organization, which is when two separate parties recognize that to get something that is out of their individual organization's reach they need the help of the other and decide to collaborate to accomplish this goal. In a sense, cooperation is a less formal type of organization and trust is its foundation. Reciprocity, sincerity, positive self-impressions, perceptions of others, clear communication, and supporting actions all work together to create a mutually trusting, and cooperative relationship. It is these factors that provide the framework for investigating the working relationship between the SDE and the school change during the implementation process.

Levels of trust vary within the underperforming schools. The district's representation of the SDE, and the limited (if any) interactions between SDE staff and the school both impact levels of trust. I expect that cooperation between the SDE and the underperforming school staff will change over time for three reasons. First, the presumptions within the new school accountability policy are so strong that initially the locals may believe being identified as underperforming equates to a hostile take over. Changing this mindset may be an arduous task for the SDE staff, and the SDE must not

only talk about cooperation and support, but also take actions that reflect their talk. The SDE is dependent on the cooperation of the school, because the SDE staff do not have the skill, expertise, or resources to take over individual schools. Second, as the SDE staff start being seen as individual people (and as the school staff are seen as individual people) with expertise and skills, this familiarity improves trust levels. In most cases, schools and SDE's are so distant from one another in the organization of the public education system that they do not even know each other. Last, the way the SDE staff, as the more dependent party, approach the implementation of new school accountability dictates the working relationship. The more able the SDE is in triggering Gouldner's (1969) norm of reciprocity, the better the working relationship, which may lead to successful policy implementation.

The limitations of applying the motivated attribution model of trust are its applications at the organizational level. Trust is a complex concept. At the organizational level trust is based on the ideas of individuals, sub groups, larger groups and finally the organization itself. These variables can cause a wide range of outcomes. Weber, Malhorta, and Murnighan (2003) suggest that it is possible to apply their model at the organizational level, but it may be difficult to obtain a single idea about the trust level of an organization. This is where the working relationship typology (Scheberle, 1997) comes into play. The model, with its limitations, has been applied to organizations. By using the model to take the "temperature" of the working relationship at different points in time, and the more detailed conceptualization of trust will help in honing in on trust levels.

Risk

Trust in a relationship encompasses some level of risk to the organization. In fact, Mayer, Davis, and Schoorman (1995) and Luhmann (1988) put forth that cooperation does not necessarily require trust, but is rather a "willingness to take risk" (Mayer, Davis, and Schoorman, 1995, p. 712). In the terms that trust is defined by Scheberle (1997), risk is included in the definition. New school accountability policy implementation represents risk especially during interventions (Brady, 2003). In fact, I suggest that this risk is evident at the institutional, organizational, and personal/professional levels for staff within the SDE and the underperforming school.

Institutionally, a school being thought of as "underperforming" risks undermining the public's faith and trust in public education as a pillar of democracy (Tyack & Cuban, 1999). An institution's credibility largely rests on the public's perception of its mission, and what it offers. If the idea of public education as a public good is destabilized, then the institution itself may be in peril. Though those in the SDE and in the underperforming school may understand that the public education system has imperfections, there is an overarching "logic of confidence" (Meyer & Rowan, 1978) within the public education system, which is "the process of maintaining the other's face or identity and thus maintaining the plausibility and legitimacy of the organization itself" (p. 102).

Organizationally, both the SDE and the underperforming school are at risk under new school accountability policy. What Meyer and Rowan (1978) refer to as the "technical core" of the school is being challenged and intervened in by virtual outsiders (the SDE). New school accountability requires those in the SDE to be experts (Lusi,

1997) in what goes on in the school. This is a dramatic shift from the administrative and regulating style of the SDE, and puts the reputation of the SDE at risk of not meeting this policy demand.

On a personal/professional level new school accountability threatens the professional, self-regulating nature of teachers, principals and SDE public administrators (Meyer & Rowan, 1978; Tyack & Cuban, 1999). With all of this risk, in many ways, the SDE and the underperforming school are on the same team, but are coming from very different perspectives. The level of risk is considerable for the SDE and the underperforming school, and therefore trust and cooperation cannot be disentangled. Acker-Hocevar and Touchton (2001) and Mathers and King (2001) found that reactions of those in the school are likely to be reactionary and defensive. The profession of teachers and schooling brings about territorial issues within the local community and within the profession of teaching (O'Day, 2002).

Early phases of new school accountability must incorporate strategies to gain the trust of those in the school and community, despite the risk. The reality and explanation of the school accountability process may be overlooked for the possible end result of strong interventions such as take over or reconstitution looming in the air. It becomes a threatening situation for schools and may naturally hinder the collaborative spirit between the SDE and the school.

Policy Incentives v. Contextual Trust

The idea of incentives is often found in the literature on policy and implementation. In much of the policy literature there is an implicit, and sometimes

explicit assumption that effective implementation of policy often has more to do with getting the incentives right than anything else (Bardach, 1977; Stoker, 1999). Stoker (1999) clearly identifies a need for incentives to motivate the target group or those responsible for implementing policy to accomplish the end goals of a policy. Logically, this makes sense, and to a degree is probably true.

While incentives may be a catalyst for change, I suggest that the longevity of a change may additionally be dependent on the level of trust and involvement between the implementers and the targets of policy implementation. The idea of trust between organizations builds upon the research of Lin (2000), which suggests that incentives are important, but additionally, the organizational context is important. The context is where one finds trust and involvement or the working relationship. When a policy requires two organizations to cooperate in a new way, a new context is created, and the relationship and levels of trust between the two organizations become embedded in this new context.

Stoker (1991) emphasizes incentives as a tool to maintain policy intent. He notes that it is incentives that will bring "reluctant partners" to the bargaining table, because the default mode within an organization is to continue to adhere to the organization's current practices and values. The example he provides is the payment of federal taxes. The assumption is that no one wants to pay taxes out of their pockets, but the desire to avoid punishment by the Internal Revenue Service motivates people to pay their taxes to avoid the risk of the consequences if they did not pay them. Bardach (1977) describe a similar type of "deterrent" system which functions on disincentives if a policy is not followed. This type of policy is like new school accountability policy. The imperative to improve educational outcomes within a school is created by the strong desire to maintain local

control and avoid the scrutiny of the state (SDE). The challenge that Bardach (1977) points to is what happens once a target, in this case the school, does not meet the improvement goals. The system of deterrence loses its incentive (or disincentive).

Stoker (1991) implies that when one is caught the swift and simple punishment of a fine may be enough to get the taxpayer back on track. At that point, the metaphor loses its currency when considering new school accountability, because the remedy is not swift, nor is it simple. Once a school is underperforming the motivation from the threat of publicly being declared underperforming is over. Therefore, a new motivation and support must be developed for new school accountability policy to be effective. This is the point where the legislation is less clear. Although it is true that there are increasing levels of intervention (or threats) that lessen local control, if a school does not respond to initial supports this may not be enough incentive for those particular schools to change or alter their delivery of education. Motivation or incentive to change cannot only come from the threat of further intervention, because it does nothing to empower or enable staff in the schools. Also it creates a situation where the SDE must become increasingly more involved in running the school, something an SDE is organizationally ill-suited to do. Also, if a school staff had been really working to improve educational outcomes (test scores) to no avail, the SDE intervening within the school may find a low morale, and a deficient level of motivation among staff (Acker-Hocevar & Touchton, 2001; Mathers & King, 2001), leading to a negative self-perception. Since the SDE needs the cooperation and the expertise of those from within the school, the policy, which creates a scenario where professional power is taken away and morale within the school is lowered, runs

counter to the direction and type of working relationship the SDE will need in order to accomplish the intended policy outcome. A change in context is needed.

Lin's (2000) ideas about the context in which a policy is implemented become important during the study of the beginning of intervention because an SDE is in a position to build new incentives by translating the federal and state requirements into the existing values and context of the underperforming school. The SDE is at once the arbitrator, the translator, and the advocate for the underperforming school. As the SDE achieves successes in these roles, new incentives to comply with new school accountability policy will be created, but underlying all of these roles and incentives is the concept of a trusting relationship between the school and the SDE. The relationship may not be strong between the two organizations, but will likely be built on the interpersonal relationships between the SDE representative and the underperforming school leaders and staff. Cooperation in a working relationship between the two requires a level of trust, common goals, shared values, and the right people forging the right relationships (Galvin & Fauske, 2000).

In the field of policy analysis the emphasis on incentives is appropriate because incentives are (possibly) within the domain that policymakers and implementers may actually control. Cooperation is dependent upon levels of trust and involvement, which are more elusive and less easy to dictate within written policy or standardized implementation procedures. One must, therefore, look at the implementation process to gain insight into the role of these characteristics. Incentives and cooperation within policy are not necessarily mutually exclusive (Weber, Malhorta & Murnighan, 2003),

without some level of trust between the policymakers and the targets, the implementation of policy disintegrates.

Even those who believe incentives are important for policy implementation mention trust as an element of any relationship (e.g., Bardach, 1977; Lin, 2000; Scheberle, 1997; Stoker, 1999). Fullan (1991) calls the idea of attempting a complete policy solution at the policy maker level a "rational fallacy." Lin (2000) describes the rational fallacy of incentives as moving and changing targets when she notes:

> No magic bullet exists for implementation. No particular set of values or incentives is best suited to the successful implementation of programs… in general. Instead, the ability of any particular set of organizational practices and beliefs to foster the successful implementation of a program can only be measured in terms of incentives it provides, at any particular time, for staff & clients to participate in the program, and in terms of the match between existing institutional values and the program activities they will justify.
>
> (Lin, 2000, p. 128)

While policy is often heralded as successful due to the tangible incentives, it does not preclude the need for the intangible trust, especially in a context that is without (at least initially) any real financial, professional, or organizational (as it exists before state intervention) incentives to cooperate with the SDE. On the other hand, there are organizational and possibly even professional incentives for members of the SDE to participate. The limited capacity of the SDE to take over a school is incentive enough to build on any existing strengths within the school in order to avoid having to take the most drastic of actions of strong interventions, which requires resources and capacity the SDE is unlikely to possess and implies a failure of the deterrent policy. The more those within the SDE recognize the need to avert takeovers, the stronger the incentive or organizational value and priority placed upon cooperating with those in the school to

improve educational outcomes. As Hanushek and Raymond (2002) note, "[m]uch less information is available about the range and scope of reactions to improve performance…the exact nature of the response…is uncertain" (pp. 30-31). The missing variable within any context for implementation is the understanding of the individual and unique situation.

Conclusion

The dynamics of the working relationship between the school and the SDE are essential to understanding the process of implementing "new accountability" systems. Kelley (2000) asserts that, "… in practice, the student, the classroom, the school, the district, and the policy environment are co-equal and interdependent partners in the education and policy system" (p. 79). However, Cuban (2004) finds that the history of the U.S. public education system reveals a loosely structured organization in which these entities (SDE, district, and school) are more prone to act as rivals rather than partners. New school accountability requires state control over the school, and compliance and commitment from the school educators, both of which the SDE does not have the perceived authority or capacity to accomplish alone.

The gap between the policy assumptions about the structure of the education system, and the reality of how it is organized requires the SDE and the underperforming school to move from a deterrent strategy to an enabling strategy that uses the assets of the individual school. This change to an enabling strategy relies upon the collaboration of the underperforming school in order to have a functioning working relationship. Limitations of information during the early phases of new school accountability

contribute to the complexity of implementation. Further, Giroux (1992) states that participants in collaboration…

> [m]ust be encouraged to cross ideological and political borders as a way of furthering the limits of their own understanding in a setting that is pedagogically safe and socially nurturing rather than authoritarian and infused with suffocating smugness of certain political correctness.
>
> (Giroux, 1992, p. 33)

Creating this environment takes time and resources the SDE and the underperforming school may not have under the short timelines for improvement in the state and federal (NCLB) guidelines. Lin (2000) identifies the need for what Bardach (1977) calls a "fixer," or what might be better described as an ambassador of the policy, as essential to implementing policy. The foundation for this role is a trusting relationship between the SDE (ambassador/translator) and the underperforming school (target). Lin (2000) notes:

> The challenge this points to is that of creating trust between those who … monitor the policy and …the target groups who feel its effects. Staff and policy targets do not resist policy, or each other, simply out of natural orneriness. Instead they do so because, directly or indirectly, program mandates or sanctions force them to abandon coping strategies that at least have the virtues of familiarity and predictability.
>
> (Lin, 2000, p. 166)

Every state in the union is developing and implementing new school accountability policy. Yet, we know very little about how an SDE and a school function under such policy. It is time to shed some light upon the implementation of new school accountability policy. If early strategic and diagnostic interventions of a school accountability system are built around these known assumptions about collaboration and unique characteristics of individual organizations within the public education system,

then moving underperforming schools into the strongest interventions may be averted. Because of the established limited capacity of the SDE's (Mintrop, 2002; Lusi, 1997; Madsen, 1994), it is in the state's best interest to have successful mild and moderate interventions requiring fewer of the scarce SDE's accountability resources.

Overcoming the threat of the policy and facing the reality of the capacity of the state and the structure of the public education system sums up the challenges of implementing new school accountability policy. The coercive nature of a "new accountability" system adds to the difficulty (Mintrop, 2002). Becher (1989) states:

> Coercion would seem a prompt and efficient means of putting any proposal into effect…[but] those who are required to carry out the resulting policies have no sense of ownership of them…. They may elect to ignore them or at best to interest them in ways that serve their own interests.
>
> (Becher, 1989, p. 54)

School ownership of the goals of new school accountability policy is essential because is it is more likely to impact the "technical core" of the school that is created and controlled by the professional educators with the school and classrooms.

Efficiency is the cornerstone of the bureaucratic assumptions within the policy, but it may not yield intended result of an improved, high quality system of education[6]. O'Day (2002) adds to this idea by specifically addressing the innate challenge of new school accountability policy.

> The heart of the issue is the problematic relationship between external and internal sources of control and the implications of this relationship for the organizational learning and improvement. Organizational systems have several mechanisms at their disposal to control the behavior of individuals and subunits.
>
> (O'Day, 2002, p. 3)

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[6] Some critics of new school accountability believe that the policy is intended to privatize the public education system. This research, however, is focused on the existing public education system and improvement of the delivery of education within that system.

Efficient and rational policy, like new school accountability, omits the social and human dynamic that makes up the public education system. The onus is upon the SDE to develop a system of accountability that accommodates this dynamic between the external and internal systems. Specific research on new school accountability, and how this rational policy is injected within the human/social dynamic is needed.

By examining the early processes and dynamics between the state and the school, the voices of the practitioners experiencing the beginning of intervention are added to the discussion of new school accountability policy and intervention into underperforming schools. Given the scarce resources of time and money along with the limited capacity of the state, collaboration with the underperforming school and respect, without "smugness," are important ingredients for improving the educational outcomes in all schools, especially underperforming schools. The working relationship between the SDE and the underperforming school is the informal organization or context in which the two are functioning during the beginning of intervention of new school accountability policy.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

This research is on the critical beginning of new school accountability implementation. The aim of the study is to find out more about the policy implementation process during the earliest phases of new school accountability from the perspective of those in the SDE and the underperforming school. Falling in line with phenomenological methodologies which are used to "...attempt to understand the meaning of events and interactions to ordinary people in particular situations" (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982, p. 31), the study is designed to understand how the working relationship between the SDE staff and the underperforming school staff changes as new school accountability policy is implemented. It strives to improve our understanding of the meanings participants place on elements of the policy during the implementation process and to identify elements that support or hamper new school accountability policy.

The assumptions at the foundation of this inquiry are that the working relationship between the SDE and the underperforming school impact the new school accountability policy implementation process, and that rather than a command and control style of implementation implied within the policy, implementation requires negotiation and bargaining between the SDE and underperforming school at the point of implementation or the "street level."

To understand this working relationship, it is necessary to explore the perceptions the SDE staff and the underperforming school staff have of one another, the history of

their relationship, and the levels of involvement and of trust in early intervention and implementation. This section provides information on the research design and methodology used to obtain these perceptions and how the working relationship changes as new school accountability policy is implemented.

All names and places, with the exception of the state where this research took place, have been changed to provide anonymity to interview participants.

Research Questions

A few things stand out with regard to this kind of research. First, it is important to understand the perceptions of the individuals engaged in implementing new school accountability policy, including both SDE officials and the "target group," which include the educators in the underperforming schools, and indirectly administrators in the districts in which the underperforming schools reside. The context of policy implementation is part of the essence of this study, and it is therefore necessary to examine these perceptions within their natural setting. For this reason, I have chosen to conduct an interpretive, phenomenological study. Both the experiences of those implementing new school accountability policy and the structure of the policy implementation process are the focal points of this qualitative study. Within this context I will focus on the following questions: 1) how do the SDE and the underperforming school understand their respective roles with regards to the implementation of new school accountability policy; 2) what is new about the relationship between the SDE and the underperforming school; 3) how do the SDE and underperforming school understand and perceive each other

within the new context; 4) how has the relationship changed over time; and 5) what has changed the relationship over time?

Throughout the exploration for answers to these questions, structure and experience are central to this research, as within any phenomenological study. As Patton (1990) states,

> ...[the] essences [of shared meaning] are the core meanings mutually understood through phenomenon commonly experienced. The experiences of different people are bracketed, and analyzed, and compared to identify the essences of the phenomenon...
>
> (p. 70)

The perceptions of the staff within the SDE and the underperforming school provide information on how new school accountability policy is understood and how this understanding changes for each as the policy is implemented.

Unit of Analysis

The phenomenon under study is the interaction between the actors within the SDE and the underperforming school during the earliest phases of state intervention and the perceptions each has of one another. This encompasses the actual interactions, communications and perceptions of one another at different points in this process.

The "earliest phases" of new school accountability intervention means the interaction between the SDE and the school after a school has been identified, investigated, and gone through a diagnostic phase (see Table 2.1). Specifically, this occurs when a school: 1) does not meet established state performance criteria, 2) meets the SDE's "strategic criteria" for state investigation of the school, and 3) is found to be

underperforming after the investigation and meets the criteria for state intervention, moving the school into the diagnostic intervention phase.

The study examines the reflections of two underperforming schools in the same school district within the state of Massachusetts toward new school accountability policy. Interviews were conducted with principals and teachers at these schools: Alfred Elementary and Babson Elementary. District administrators, who participate in school improvement efforts in the Charlesburg Public School District, were also interviewed as part of the local level interviews. At the state level, administrators from the Massachusetts Department of Education, whose primary function is early intervention, underperforming schools, and school improvement, were interviewed. In addition, interviews were conducted with members of ABC Consulting, which is a consulting firm that contracts with the Massachusetts Department of Education on many of the early intervention activities.

In Massachusetts early intervention is broken into two stages: the *School Panel Review* and the *Fact Finding Review*. The School Panel Review is much like the strategic criteria described in Table 2.1 and is used "[t]o assist the Commissioner in determining whether state intervention is needed to guide improvement efforts in schools where students' MCAS [Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System] performance is critically low and no trend toward improved student performance is evident from MCAS data" (Massachusetts Department of Education, Unknown). The School Review Panel, made up of administrators and educators from other Massachusetts school districts, submits a report to the Massachusetts Commissioner of Education. The

Commissioner then makes a determination on the status of the school based on information from this report.

If the Commissioner decides that a school is indeed "underperforming" then it must go through the diagnostic intervention called the *Fact Finding Review.* During this longer and more in-depth visit, contractors, who represent the DOE (members of ABC Consulting), with support from practitioners (from schools and districts that are outside of the district being intervened in), identify strengths and weaknesses that are used to inform the school improvement plan process.

Information from the Fact Finding Review is used during the diagnostic and corrective intervention, which includes a school improvement planning process called the *Performance Improvement Mapping (PIM).* PIM is a series of intensive technical assistance sessions for underperforming school teams that include the principal and are convened by the DOE. All underperforming schools are required to attend. District representatives also attend the PIM training but are generally not a part of a particular team, though they may serve as team facilitators. The outcome of the PIM training is to equip school teams with improvement tools based on data driven decision making. School teams are then expected to return to their schools and develop a school improvement plan using the tenets of PIM. The point when a school is identified as being potentially underperforming, diagnosed as underperforming, and provided technical assistance or from the School Panel Review, to the Fact Finding Review to the PIM encompasses the "earliest phases" of new school accountability policy implementation in Massachusetts.

The study of early intervention within two Massachusetts elementary schools (Alfred Elementary and Babson Elementary) was conducted in a single public school district (Charlesburg Public School District) from February through November 2004. The observations of four School Panel Reviews occurred in three districts including the Charlesburg District from February through March 2004. Two of the School Panel Reviews were conducted in the Charlesburg district in which the two elementary schools selected for study reside. One of the elementary School Panel Reviews observed ended up being one of the elementary schools that was selected for interviews (Babson Elementary). Each School Panel Review lasted for two days. One Fact Finding Review was observed in May 2004 in the Charlesburg District. The Fact Finding Review lasted for four consecutive days. Interviews of the participants occurred between September and November 2004. Seventeen interviews were conducted ranging from 35 minutes to 180 minutes in length. The average interview lasted approximately 60 minutes. An estimated 17 hours of interviews were conducted in person, and over the phone.

In pursuit of understanding the relationships among participants during the earliest phases of new school accountability, the research project is limited to the examination of the relationship between the state and two underperforming elementary schools (Alfred Elementary and Babson Elementary). Alfred Elementary went under review in the 2003 underperforming school review cycle, had been through the early intervention and was being "monitored" by the DOE. The second school, Babson Elementary, was selected from the 2004 underperforming school review cycle. Babson Elementary went through the School Panel Review, the Fact Finding Review in 2004 (during the year of time of this research), and was awaiting the approval of their PIM

(school improvement) plan by the Massachusetts Board of Education at the time of the study.

The decision to focus on two schools was made for several reasons. First, by limiting the number of schools studied, I hoped to gain a deeper insight to the relationship and perceptions of participants through in-depth interviews and surveys, thus increasing my ability to see the intricacies of this interaction. As Seidman (1991) notes, "the method of in-depth, phenomenological interviewing applied to a sample of participants who all experience similar structural and social conditions gives enormous power to the stories of a relatively few participants" (p. 45). Second, there is a limited pool of underperforming schools to choose from within Massachusetts. Only 26 schools have been declared underperforming since the first reviews/interventions (2000) and of those 12 are elementary schools. Two elementary schools make up nearly 10% of the underperforming schools within the state, and 17 % of the underperforming elementary schools within Massachusetts.

In the 2003 and 2004 review cycles there were more elementary schools selected for visits than any other type of school. This may be due in part to the greater numbers of elementary schools within the state and may signal that the Massachusetts DOE is focusing on this segment of the target population as an overall strategy (see Table 3.1). Because there are more elementary schools participating in the process, the likelihood of finding two elementary schools that were willing to participate in the study was greater. Since the DOE has reviewed a number of elementary schools, with the additional experience of working with elementary schools, there may be a better established

process, and it may be more indicative of the general characteristics of developing a working relationship when implementing new school accountability policy.

The timeframe is limited to two years of a process that has been officially occurring for four years,[1] because a significant policy change occurred in the 2002-2003 academic year (as of the 2003 underperforming school review year). In that academic year, districts with high numbers of underperforming schools were provided with state funding for a *school support specialist* (specialist) to be placed in the district and considered an employee of the state, who supports schools in need of improvement and underperforming schools both in terms of the federal No Child Left Behind Act, 2001 (NCLB) and the state Massachusetts Education Reform, 1993 (MERA) legislation. The specialist strategy has more than likely altered the relationship between the state and the school. Therefore examination of the relationship before and after the specialist, may be inconsistent. The inconsistency has been accounted for by limiting the research to the 2003 and 2004 underperforming review cycles, which, at the time of this research, encompassed all of the cycles that occurred after the specialist strategy was implemented.

Table 3.1: Massachusetts Schools Visited and Declared Underperforming, by Year, by Type

	Total		**Elementary**		**Middle**[2]		**High**	
	Visited	**UPS**	Visited	**UPS**	Visited	**UPS**	Visited	**UPS**
TOTAL	61	**26**	23	**12**	33	**12**	5	**2**
2000	8	**4**	1	**0**	7	**4**	0	**0**
2001	11	**0**	0	**0**	10	**0**	1	**0**
2002	12	**6**	3	**1**	7	**3**	2	**2**
2003	14	**8**	9	**6**	3	**2**	2	**0**
2004	16	**8**	10	**5**	6	**3**	0	**0**

UPS is the abbreviation for schools declared underperforming school.

[1] The Underperforming School Review process was first piloted in the 1999-2000 academic year. However, the official beginning of these reviews is considered to be in the 2000-2001 academic year.
[2] There are four kindergartens through eighth grade schools that have been visited, and one has been declared underperforming. The schools are counted in the "middle" school category.

In the past two cycles 15 schools have been declared underperforming and of those 11 are elementary schools. In fact, all but one of the elementary schools declared underperforming have been designated underperforming in the past two cycles (See Figure 3.1). The specialist strategy and the concentration upon elementary schools have coincided, and make the elementary school level the best fit for studying the early phases of new school accountability policy.

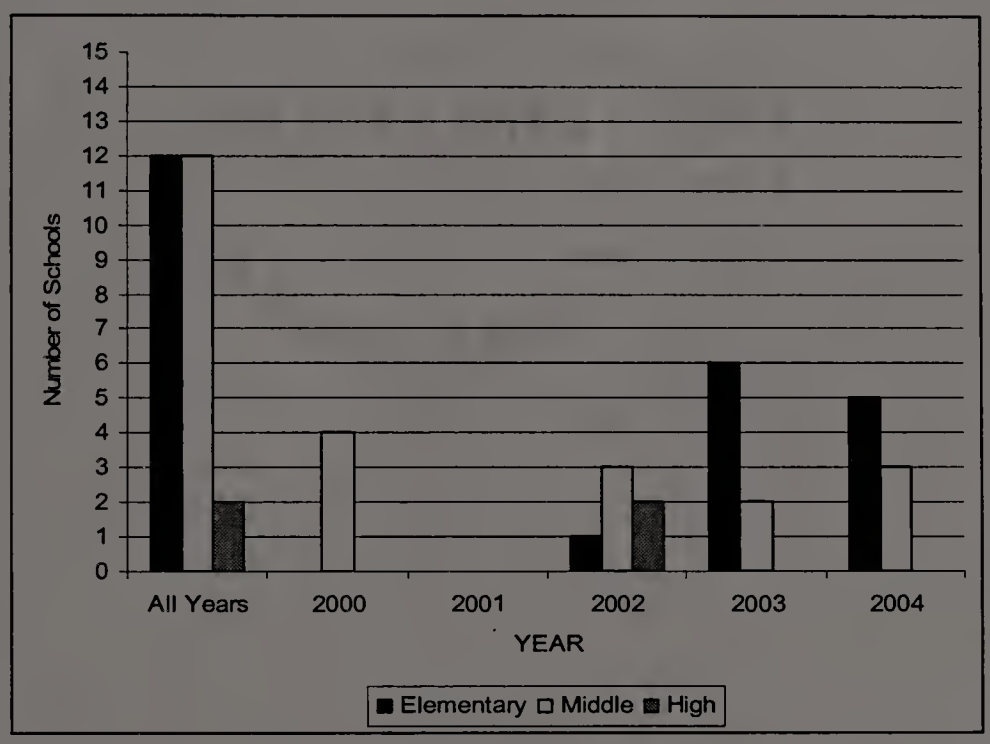

Figure 3.1: 2000-2004 Massachusetts Schools Declared Underperforming, by Type, by Year

The school interviews were conducted in Alfred Elementary and Babson Elementary. Each school was declared underperforming by the Massachusetts Commissioner of Education. To get an idea of how perceptions change over time, each individual school was chosen on the basis of being declared underperforming in a different academic year to capture how the new school accountability policy "settles." Alfred Elementary School participated in the 2003 underperforming review cycle, and Babson Elementary School participated in the more recent 2004 underperforming review

cycle. By selecting schools from two different review cycles, I mean to examine the threat of state intervention that principals (Acker-Hocevar & Touchton, 2001) feel early in the process, and to observe how the working relationship with the SDE evolves as time and different phases of intervention are understood over time. Moreover, this allows for a time dimension to be added to Scheberle's (1997) working relationship typology.

Limitations

The rationale for selecting schools that have been declared underperforming in different academic years is to capture the differences in involvement and trust that emerge as the relationship evolves between the school and the state. The purpose of the method is to capture a point in time, and fit within time constraints of the research. A limitation of this approach is that each school setting is unique. As Salomon (1991) finds that,

> Classrooms (schools, families, therapies, cultures) are complex, often nested conglomerates of interdependent variables, events, perceptions, attitudes, expectations, and behaviors and thus cannot be approached in the same way that a study of single events and single variables can.
>
> (p. 1)

Another limitation to selecting schools from different review periods is that it requires staff from schools declared underperforming in a previous year to recollect how they felt at different points in time. Weick (2001) calls attention to the idea that people tend to rationalize past actions or decisions into a sense making framework after the fact and may ignore the complexities and unknown that was present when they were taking the action or making the decision. This limitation, however, may be lessened because schools are being selected two different points in time, so that information on the

immediate reaction to SDE intervention is mostly taken from the underperforming school declared underperforming in the 2004 underperforming school review cycle. The underperforming school selected from the 2003 underperforming school review cycle was in the second year of SDE intervention and therefore provides a view point that allows participates to reflect upon their perceptions during early intervention and make sense of the process in retrospect (Weick, 2001).

The interviews of teachers in Alfred Elementary and Babson Elementary reveal different dispositions and attitudes toward the state, which may or may not be attributed to the difference in time. For example, Alfred Elementary, having been declared underperforming a year prior to Babson Elementary, certainly yielded answers to questions with more of a reflective and sense-making disposition.

Additionally, it is sometimes challenging for teachers to distinguish between the different points in time (i.e. the School Panel Review versus the Fact Finding Review). Participants saw both as simply a "state visit." Babson Elementary participants had similar challenges, but because it was relatively recent, the principal and teachers had more clarity about the different visits and their feelings during the different points in time.

Participants

The participants for this study are those who participate in the beginning of intervention at the state and the local level. They fall into two broad categories: state level participants, and local level participants.

State Level Participants

Four members of the Massachusetts Department of Education Accountability and Targeted Assistance Cluster (DOE) were interviewed along with three members of the consulting firm ABC Consulting who: provide staffing, write reports for the panel, and conduct the bulk of the fact-finding reviews of underperforming schools.

At the DOE the School Accountability and Targeted Assistance (ATA) Cluster is the part of the organization responsible for all aspects of the beginning of intervention. Interviews were conducted with four DOE staff including: 1) Daphne, the Director of School Performance Evaluation, who coordinates all aspects of the underperforming school reviews; 2) Debra, the Administrator for School and District Planning Support, who provides planning and support to the school support specialists within the district; 3) Dianne, a DOE Coordinator, who acts as a DOE liaison and monitor by visiting schools during the reviews and monitoring them after they have been declared underperforming; and 4) Dan, the DOE liaison, who also plays the role of DOE monitor. It is worthy of noting that many of the DOE staff I interviewed played a multitude of roles within ATA and their titles were modified accordingly. However, the titles used here are appropriate to their roles and participation in the beginning of intervention.

Interviews with the contractors from ABC Consulting, who work with the DOE on early intervention were also conducted. Specifically, interviews were conducted with: 1) Christie, the Director of Resource Development, who is the main contact for the DOE and coordinates the school accountability work with the DOE, and who also acts as a Chairperson on School Panel Reviews and Fact Finding Reviews; 2) Chuck, a subcontractor of the consulting group, who is a retired principal and who has served as a

chairperson on many school panel and fact finding reviews over the past three years; and 3) Caitlin, a subcontractor, who serves as a staff person on School Panel and Fact Finding Reviews and who is the primary report writer for these reviews. The ABC consulting group, like many consulting groups, uses a wide array of subcontractors with specialized skills and experiences who are contracted with on an "as needed" basis. When hired on projects, however, they are representing ABC Consulting.

Interviews with participants at the DOE and ABC Consulting were conducted with members who are most active in the beginning of intervention. The DOE uses ABC Consulting to contract out services that enhance the skills and capacity of the DOE. ABC Consulting offers the DOE expertise in dealing with evaluations and issues of school accountability, the ability to expand the number of people visiting schools during the time and labor intensive periods of early intervention, and contract with former principals, superintendents and highly skilled educators who have a more in-depth understanding of schools and how they function than the DOE staff. These people are the "face" of the state and therefore, their actions during the beginning of intervention become the foundation of the working relationship between the SDE and the underperforming school.

Local Level Participants

The local level participants consist of both those from the district and the underperforming school. Participants interviewed at the local level include: school support specialists, district administrators, school principals, and teachers.

Participants from within the district provide a slightly different perspective on the SDE than those in the school. District employees presumably work with the DOE in relation to all schools that are underperforming within their district. Therefore at a

minimum the district/SDE relationship has been on going since 2000 when new school accountability policy was first implemented. The relationship between the district and the DOE has had a longer period to develop and the implementation of the specialist strategy may have strengthened the connection between the DOE and the district. As with many of the larger urban districts within Massachusetts, there are several underperforming schools within the selected Charlesburg District. Consequently, over the years the Charlesburg District staff and DOE staff have more familiarity with one another because they have been interacting since the first underperforming school review cycle.

School support specialists are paid for by the DOE and are technically employees of the DOE who work in their designated district. To those in the district the specialist appears to be a district employee because one of the requirements of the specialist is to understand the district and therefore the specialists have worked in the district for many years. An example of how ingrained the specialist position is within the district is: when the superintendent of the Charlesburg District was contacted for an interview for this research, his response that the district person and his representative in charge of underperforming schools was one of the Charlesburg school support specialists.

Interviews were conducted with the two school support specialists (Stan and Sandy). Both specialists were long time veterans of the district. They have each served in many capacities from teacher, to counselor, to curriculum director, to principal, to assistant superintendent. Originally, the plan was to interview the Superintendent as well, but as mentioned, after contacting him, he recommended I speak with Stan, who represents the district on the topic of school accountability.

Traditionally, those in the district are guides for those in the school, especially with regard to state compliance. Consequently, the perspective of participants at the district level sets the tone, and informs some of the perceptions that participants in the underperforming schools may have about the SDE. Because the Massachusetts DOE funded specialist positions in the ten districts that have the majority of the underperforming schools within the state, the specialist strategy proves to be an important link in developing a working relationship between the state and local levels. The specialist strategy enhances the ability of the state to build a "bridge" to align the external and internal accountability systems.

Underperforming school administrators and teachers working with the DOE staff were interviewed to provide the school level perspective. Each of the underperforming elementary school principals in Charlesburg were contacted via email and post mail. Two principals expressed interest in participating in the research project. Coincidentally the two schools were from the 2003 (Alfred Elementary) and 2004 (Babson Elementary) underperforming review cycles. From there the principals within each of the schools gave permission to contact other teachers within the school.

In both Alfred Elementary and Babson Elementary the principals provided the names of many staff who were involved in some capacity of the school improvement planning. Though one might assume that these would be the staff working with the DOE, this was not always the case. The degree to which the teachers interacted with the state had some variation.

Still, the teachers who were working the most with the DOE (e.g., in the PIM process) set the tone for intervention and the attitudes in the school towards DOE. The

variation in the levels of involvement with the DOE among the teachers proved to be a good way to check information and opinions to guard "against drawing easy conclusions" (Seidman, 1991, p. 44) and to support the reliability of the information that is gathered.

Participant Selection

The study focuses on two elementary schools (Alfred Elementary and Babson Elementary) from the same district (Charlesburg District) in the state of Massachusetts. Massachusetts was selected because it has had a statutory mandate for new school accountability policy since 1993 and because the DOE has been a front runner in complying with the accountability requirements of the federal *No Child Left Behind Act, 2001(NCLB)* (Olson, 2003). The state began implementing a system of new school accountability prior to the passage of the NCLB, and it has a school accountability infrastructure that other states may still be developing. The state's policy is similar to the requirements in the NCLB, and, in areas where it is deficient, the Massachusetts DOE has worked to comply with the federal requirements.

I selected a state with this type of pre-existing infrastructure in the hope that it may have a more developed system that those from which states that are not as far along in implementation might be able to learn. The statutory mandate shows the evidence of commitment from politicians and policymakers within the state. The commitment is reflected in the thoughtful and evolving new school accountability policy being implemented by the DOE. Another reason for selecting a state with more implementation experience is that there are more underperforming schools to select from.

Table 3.2: Summary of Participants

Level	Name	Title	Organization
State Level (n=7)			
	Daphne	Director of School Performance Evaluation	Department of Education
	Debra	Administrator for school and district planning support	Department of Education
	Dianne	DOE Coordinator	Department of Education
	Dan	Underperforming School Liaison	Department of Education
	Christie	Director of Resource Development/Panel Chair	ABC Consulting
	Chuck	Panel Chair	ABC Consulting
	Caitlin	Panelist/Report Writer	ABC Consulting
Local Level (n=10)			
	Stan	school support specialist (specialist)	Charlesburg District
	Sandy	school support specialist (specialist)	Charlesburg District
	Mr. Arnold	Principal	Alfred Elementary
	Anita	Teacher	Alfred Elementary
	Amelia	Teacher	Alfred Elementary
	Adeline	Teacher	Alfred Elementary
	Ms. Beth	Principal	Babson Elementary
	Brenda	Teacher	Babson Elementary
	Bridget	Teacher	Babson Elementary
	Barbara	Teacher	Babson Elementary

State Department of Education

The SDE selected is the Massachusetts Department of Education (DOE). The DOE implemented the first round of site visits in the 1999-2000 academic year (2000 piloted underperforming school review cycle). In the first year the process was piloted (2000) two schools were found to be underperforming, and since being implemented

(2001- 2004) an additional 24 schools have been found to be underperforming for a total of 26 underperforming schools. Table 3.3 shows the schools visited between 2000 and 2004.

Table 3.3: Massachusetts Schools Selected for Review and Declared Underperforming, 2000-2004

	Total	Elementary	Middle[3]	High
Selected for a School Panel Review	61	23	33	5
Declared Underperforming	26	12	12	2

At both the School Panel Reviews and the longer Fact Finding Reviews, I gained permission to observe the process from the Associate Commissioner of the Accountability and Targeted Assistance Cluster in the DOE. In total I observed four of the two-day School Panel Reviews in three different school districts, and one of the four-day Fact Finding Reviews. At each of the reviews I observed, I was presented as a neutral observer of the state team visits to the school during the 2004 reviews. Permission to observe all of the reviews was sought from the DOE, the Panel Chairs from ABC Consulting, the district superintendent, and the underperforming school principals.

Interviews conducted with representatives of the Massachusetts DOE were self-designated into one of the following categories: 1) DOE Staff or Contractor, who is directly involved with the underperforming school (visits the school); 2) DOE employee or Contractor, who primarily coordinates or manages the school accountability process; or 3) DOE or contractor employees, who do both coordination, management and visit the schools.

[3] Schools that were designated kindergarten through eighth grade (K-8) have been counted with the "middle" school category. Three of these (K-8) schools are from the Lawrence School District and one is from the Springfield School District.

Table 3.4: State Interview Participants, by Category of Involvement in Early Intervention

	Visits Schools (Directly Involved)	Coordinator/ Management	Both (Visit/Coordinate)	Total
DOE	1	2	1	4
Contractor (ABC Consulting)	2	0	1	3
Total	3	2	2	7

District

The Charlesburg District was chosen for a number of reasons. First, it is a mid-size urban district with more than two underperforming schools. Second, it was the district in which I conducted two School Panel Review observations and one Fact Finding Review observation, so I was more familiar with the district. Third, the district had recently undergone the state's district accountability review, which made data on the district and background information readily available. Fourth, while the district suffers from many of the plights of an urban district, its public education system is not in immediate danger of being taken over by the DOE for academic reasons. Of those 26 schools that have declared underperforming, 5 are in districts that are in danger of, or in the recent past already have been, intervened in by the state[4]. Last, it was one of only two districts have more than two underperforming elementary schools.

The combination of potential takeover and a large enough sample of underperforming elementary schools proved to be somewhat rare, and narrowed down the potential districts. Access to district personnel that have a familiarity with all levels of

[4] Some of the school districts that have faced state intervention, were not intervened in because of new school accountability policy, however, this prior relationship with the state may alter the findings. For this reason schools will not be selected from these districts.

those in the public schools was an invaluable characteristic of the mid-size urban district and the district specialists agreed to participate in the study.

Underperforming Schools

Once permission for the research at the district level was obtained, all of the underperforming elementary schools were contacted to see if there was interest in participating in the study. Three of the elementary school principals expressed interest, and two of those expressed a more serious interest by scheduling appointments for interviews. The two elementary schools in some ways were self-selected based on their interest to participate. They each came from the appropriate underperforming school review cycle (Alfred Elementary from the 2003 cycle and Babson Elementary from the 2004 cycle).

At the end of each of the principal interviews, permission to interview teachers was obtained. In both instances the principals provided a list of names of teachers that may be able to provide insight to the intervention process. These teachers came from a variety of involvement levels in the underperforming school status. Permission to observe and interview participants was obtained on an individual teacher basis.

Participants from the school were placed into categories. Those in the school were self-designated into one of the following categories: 1) those who are directly involved with the underperforming school process; 2) those who are indirectly involved, meaning there is no personal relationship with the SDE, but some of work is directly related to the underperforming school status; or 3) those who are aware of the underperforming school status, but are not directly impacted by this. The school interviews break down is shown in Table 3.5.

Table 3.5: School and District Interview Participants, by Category of Involvement with the DOE

	Directly Involved	Indirectly Involved	Not Involved	Total
District	2	0	0	2
Alfred Elementary	1	1	2	4
Babson Elementary	2	2	0	4
Total	5	3	2	10

Data Collection

In a phenomenological study, the researcher is attempting to interpret human interaction (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982, p. 31). In this type of study it is therefore important to begin by listening and observing (Psathas, 1973). The data collection process was designed to accommodate this need and to use multiple methods of collection. Data was collected in three ways: 1) analysis and review of documentation pertaining to the new school accountability process, 2) observation of the DOE visits to potentially underperforming schools, and 3) loosely structured interviews conducted with DOE and school staff. The variety of data collection methods has provided information about and insight on the actions taken by the DOE and the underperforming school.

Document Analysis

Documents developed by the school for the state and by the state for the school during the process of reviewing and intervening in the underperforming school were reviewed. These documents fall into three categories: Process documentation, underperforming school documentation, and underperforming school reports.

Process Documentation

Process documents are those generic documents developed by the DOE for the School Panel Reviews and the Fact Finding Reviews. These are specifically developed for the training of the state representatives (panelists and consultants) that participate in the early phases of new school accountability to ensure consistency during implementation by a multitude of panelists. The documentation is not necessarily given directly to the underperforming school, though much of this information is made available to the general public on the DOE website. Summaries of the process documentation are provided to the school principal, who is encouraged (not required) to share the information with school faculty and staff.

Underperforming School Documentation

These are the internal[5] documents from and about the underperforming school used by the state to assess the ability of the school to improve without DOE intervention. These documents include an anonymous teacher survey conducted by the DOE, the school's improvement plan, student body demographic information, the staffing information, MCAS results for the school and district, a leadership report from the principal developed specifically for the DOE review, and any other pertinent information the principal and/or DOE feels should be included. Documents pertaining to the two elementary schools selected for study will be reviewed for this research.

Underperforming School Reports

The underperforming school reports are different from the "documentation" in that they are the result of reviews of an underperforming school. These are the public

[5] Technically the "internal" documentation is made available to the general public, however, all reviewers must return this documentation to the DOE and those that request access to the information are only allowed to review the information on the premises of the DOE headquarters.

documents that synthesize information gathered from the review of the underperforming school documentation and the site visits to the school. Officially two reports are developed by the state. The first is the report from the *School Panel Review*, which is used by the Commissioner to make a determination about a school's status. The second is the *Fact Finding Review* report, which is used to inform the future technical assistance and support for the underperforming school.

In each case, the school and/or district are allowed to respond to these reports in writing to the Commissioner. This is a route for the school principal to pursue any inaccuracies or omissions within the report and these are considered part of the "reports" because they are public and become part of the report process.

Observations

The observation portion of the study is intended to provide insight into the early phases and processes surrounding new school accountability in Massachusetts. Through over 110 hours of observations, I have observed how the process works and how the DOE staff, consulting staff working on behalf of the state, and practitioners who participate in the state reviews connect with the underperforming school leaders and staff. Specifically, I was interested in learning how the school staff reacts to questions made by the state team and how the state teams delivered information about the method of the DOE's method of implementing new school accountability policy.

Also of interest was how the state team brought about a transition in the underperforming school staffs' understanding of the policy from one that is top down and controlling, to a policy that relies on mutual involvement and cooperation to be effectively implemented. The team, as the first state entity to come face-to-face with the

school, is in a position to commence the relationship between the SDE and the underperforming school off to a good (or bad) start. Therefore, the manner and attitudes of the team toward the school are important to the implementation process and to the type of working relationship that develops between the DOE and the school.

Observations of the state and (potentially) underperforming school were allowed by permission of the Massachusetts Department of Education, district superintendent, and underperforming school principals and teachers. In each instance observation participants were given a description of the project and researcher contact information. At each meeting with school staff, I was introduced and provided an oral explanation of my role as a neutral observer (separate from the state team). Each participant was then provided with written documentation about the project in the form of an Informed Consent for Observations (appendix B).

Observations were specifically targeted at two official parts of the Massachusetts School Accountability Process. The first was the School Panel Review, which is when a team consisting of a DOE liaison, ABC Consulting staff and a group of school practitioners from throughout the state interview district and underperforming school staff and visit the underperforming school over a period of two days. In the four School Panel Reviews that I observed, the DOE liaison, ABC Consulting staff, and school practitioners on the team were made aware of my presence as an observer during the process. In most instances the DOE liaison notified the school principals of my role as an observer and researcher in advance of the visit. Because a number of the initial School Panel Review visits are conducted simultaneously in different parts of the state, I was only be able to observe a sample of the total number of DOE visits for a total of about 72

hours of observation during the 2004 underperforming review cycle. One of the observations of the School Panel Review was at Babson Elementary. No observations of the cycle were conducted at Alfred Elementary because the study was conducted in the year after the school was declared underperforming.

The second part of the school accountability process is the *Fact Finding Review.* This review is for the schools that are determined to be underperforming based on information gathered during the School Panel Review and a determination by the Commissioner. The Fact Finding Review is designed to take an in-depth look at the processes and practices within a school and to make suggestions about areas in need of improvement. I participated as an observer during this four day process, which consisted of a strategy meeting of the ABC Consulting Chair and Panelist and visiting the school with the ABC Consulting Chair and Panelist as well as a team of practitioners, who conducted interviews, focus groups and classroom observations. The results of these activities are summarized into a brief report, which identifies some of the key strengths and weaknesses in the school so that the principal and staff attending the PIM (school improvement planning technical assistance provided by the state) training have a diagnosis of areas to concentrate on during the school improvement planning sessions.

Loosely Structured Interviews

The loosely structured interview as a method is used to allow interview participants to convey their feelings about the implementation processes of new school accountability policy. In this study, I expected and found that the participants' perceptions emerged during the loosely structured interview. The perspectives of those in the DOE and the underperforming school provided insight into their attitudes toward

the policy, their understanding of the policy as they went through its implementation and their understanding of the organizational context. Specifically, I was interested in finding out about the feelings of trust, involvement and cooperation between the DOE and underperforming school staff.

Another component of interest was time. How a school employee or a DOE employee feel about one another is likely to change over time. The two schools, having been declared underperforming in different years, have different perceptions and attitudes towards new school accountability policy. For example, Alfred Elementary has been underperforming longer and has a more established relationship with the DOE, while Babson Elementary has more recently been declared underperforming and may not have as clear of a picture as to how they felt toward the DOE.

The interviews were conducted with DOE staff and underperforming school staff who participated in the early phases of new school accountability policy implementation. Participants were asked to review the questions (appendix A) and provide feedback on ways to improve the questions, or additional questions that might be asked. Each interview participant was asked to sign an informed consent (appendix B), which provided information about the project and contact information for future follow-up. Interviews were taped with the permission of the participant. Additionally, notes were taken during the interviews. In all but one of the 17 interviews participants agreed to allow the interview to be taped. At the one interview that was not taped, I took notes and applied them to the interview questions.

The interviews lasted approximately one hour and follow-up questions were sought in person, over the phone or through electronic correspondence, as they were

needed. All interviews were transcribed. Transcriptions were provided to the interview participant for his/her review. In the case of the one interview that was not taped, the notes were typed and submitted to the participant for approval. This "member-checking" method (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) was used to ensure the trustworthiness and credibility of the information gathered during the interview (Seidman, 1991, p. 75). In some instances comments and additional information were provided by the interview participants and included in the transcript.

Data Collection Limitations

"…[I]nstitutional relationships and implementation process on any but the smallest scale are simply too numerous and diverse to admit of our asserting law like propositions about them" (Bardach, 1977, p. 57). To account for this challenge that many researchers, who attempt to study policy implementation in its natural environment, face, Salamon (1991) suggests that a "systemic" approach captures "…the richness of events and actions in complex social environments…recognizing the inter-dependence, inseparability and transactional elements among elements" (Chatterji, 2004, p. 7). This is a limitation found in many studies. Cronbach and Associates suggests thinking of it as a "before-and-after study" (Cronbach, et. al., 1980, p. 271) in which you begin the study with a small sample and use this small sample to develop the most pointed issues and questions that arise and increasing the sample size to broaden this research after these "pointed, significant questions" (p. 271) have been developed. The research as conducted is therefore a "before" study to develop and strengthen questions about the working relationship between the state and local during the beginning of intervention in the underperforming school.

Consequently, the endeavor is still worthwhile because it serves as information for those in this particular circumstance of implementing new school accountability policy. It uncovers a dynamic of relationship between the state and the school that may point to a new era in the history of public education within the United States. It is a starting point for future research on the early stages of state intervention in the local underperforming schools.

Within any phenomenological research the subjective meaning from the perspective of the participants is essential to understanding. In fact, Bogdan and Biklen (1982) identify the participant's "point of view" as the foundation of the research construct. By researching a specific event, the researcher may impose more thought than the participant may have put upon a situation without the researcher's prodding. This forces the participant to think more deeply about the subject and develop a "point of view." It is semi-manufactured (motivated by the researcher's questions), however, it is important to seek the perceptions of stakeholders in the new school accountability policy, and thus questions were selected, so as not to be leading, and they were open-ended to improve the chances for the participants' perceptions to emerge.

Data Analysis

In any phenomenological study, it is essential to allow the themes to emerge from the data. Data from the document analysis, observations, and interviews have intermingled to unfold a larger story about how new school accountability policy is implemented and how the SDE and underperforming school relationship develops during the process. Rather than impose a structure upon the data, Scheberle's (1997) "Working

Relationship Typology" (with an added time dimension) functions as "data analysis scaffolding" that guides the direction of the research questions. As opposed to fitting the data into the boxes within the working relationship typology, information from this research was guided by Scheberle's (1997) research experience, and the typology itself was honed, or altered depending on the emerging data. It is the basis for examining the status of the working relationship at different points in the new school accountability policy implementation process. Information gathered through interviews, observations, and document review have been analyzed to determine the levels of involvement and trust existing at different phases of implementation.

Scheberle's Working Relationship Typology Adapted

Figure 3.2 represents a typology of working relationships adapted from Scheberle (1997) for the state and local relationship between the SDE and the underperforming school. In this typology, two essential elements of working relationships are identified as important to the interaction between the SDE and the school staff: mutual trust and involvement.

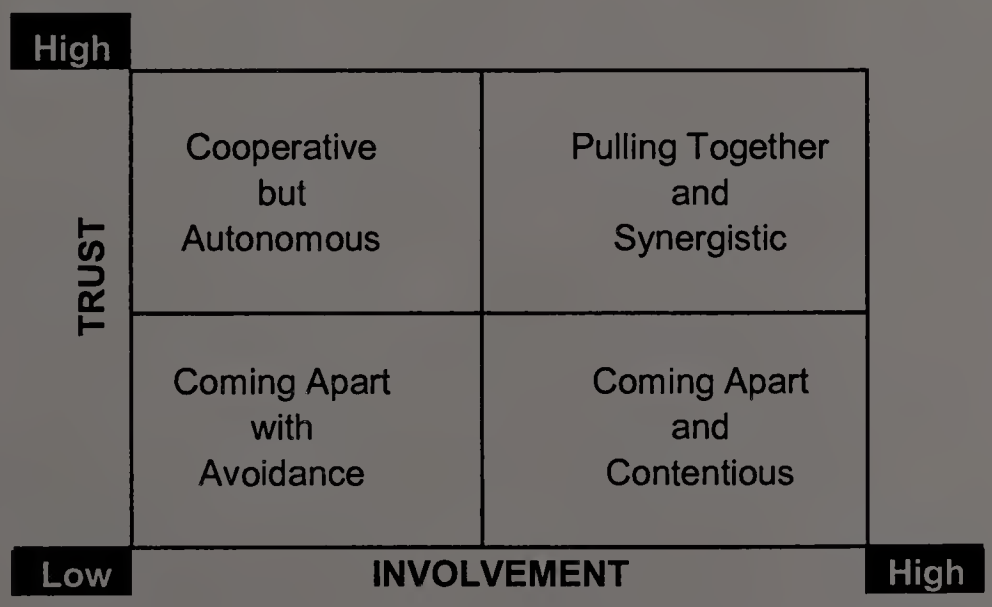

Figure 3.2 A Typology of *State and Local* Working Relationships[6]

[6] This is derived from Scheberle (1997) "Typology of Federal and State Working Relationships" (p. 18).

Within this typology the variables of involvement and trust are examined during the early phases of new school accountability policy implementation. In particular the perceptions of those in the SDE and the underperforming school have been sought. Involvement is defined as the interaction between the SDE and the school during the early phases, and also includes the history of the relationship, the expected duration of the relationship, and the expectations about the future of the relationship as perceived by both the SDE and the school.

Trust is defined by Scheberle as the degree to which the other is dedicated to the "intent of the policy." By adding a time dimension, reciprocity between the two organizations has been captured. To examine particular elements of trust, aspects of the motivated attributions model of trust developed by Murnighan, Malhotra and Weber (2003) are used. Specifically the characteristics of: feelings of dependence, sincerity of trusting acts, evaluation of ambiguous information (positively or negatively), perceived likelihood of reciprocity of the other party, risk reducing behaviors to encourage trust, and consistent and clear communication.

By combining the levels of involvement with trust found at different points in time, one is able to see the differences in the working relationship between the SDE and the school over time. In congruence with the negotiation model of implementation, and the evolving nature of policy implementation, the time element reveals how the working relationship between the SDE and the underperforming school and the district evolves and changes by moving into different quadrants as new school accountability policy is implemented. The implementation strategies employed by the SDE affects the working

relationship and changes as the enabling strategy becomes clearer to those in the underperforming school and district. The following details the expectations of how the working relationship is characterized in each of the four quadrants: 1) pulling together and synergistic, 2) cooperative but autonomous, 3) coming apart with avoidance, and 4) coming apart and contentious.

"Pulling together and synergistic" is high in trust and involvement between the two entities. According to Scheberle this is the ideal working relationship. It is characterized as a general willingness of both parties to contribute, support, and play an active role in the implementation of policy. Characterized by high levels of trust, the level of threat on an institutional, organizational or personal level is minimal. A high level of involvement between the two entities means that there are resources and/or commitment for both to work together to a common goal. This type of working relationship is reminiscent of Weick's (1979) definition of organization as the point when two separate entities recognize that to achieve a desired goal they must work together. A "pulling together and synergistic" working relationship is the point when Weick's definition is realized.

In this type of working relationship there is an understanding by both the SDE and the underperforming school staff that they need one another to accomplish the goals of new school accountability. I expected to find a common recognition among both parties about the issues of being an underperforming school with an equal part of empathy and motivation to improve the educational outcomes within the school. Communication between the SDE and the school is clear and the expectations of all involved are explicit and understood at the state and local levels. Also, though being declared

"underperforming" may be seen as a negative experience, the process of implementing new school accountability policy brings about a positive experience for those in the SDE and the school. Because the level of involvement is high in this type of relationship, beyond a strong commitment to the policy, I would expect the state to have allocated enough resources to provide for high levels of staff involvement, and to provide technical assistance and training as needed.

A "cooperative but autonomous" relationship is marked by high levels of trust, but low levels of involvement. This type of working relationship is "cooperative, but lonely" (Scheberle, 1997, p. 20). The loosely coupled nature of public education systems within the United States makes it likely that involvement between the SDE and the school is low. This type of working relationship is dependent upon the technology and expertise within the underperforming school. Though the SDE is trusting of the school, its limited capacity and expertise (Lusi, 1997) make it difficult to fully engage and support the underperforming school. This relationship is marked by limitations of resources, expertise and capacity. Because of the high levels of trust between the two parties, communication is open and explicit; however the distance between the two restricts the implementation to the capacity of the school. Trust is the glue in this type of working relationship.

"Coming apart with avoidance" is a relationship with low levels of trust and involvement. Scheberle (1997) describe this type of relationship as "token" or "skin deep" (p 21). The type of working relationship may also exist in a loosely coupled system, like the public education system. In this type of relationship I would expect to find poor communication that is plagued by misunderstanding and misperceptions of

actions. Energy by both or either party is spent putting up a positive image, and the real challenges and issues are often hidden from one another. The school staff might show deference or what Goffman (1967) refers to as "avoidance rituals," toward the SDE staff, because they work at the state level, but this is only part of the show. By providing an image that everything is all right, intervention may be avoided, and because there is low involvement, this may actually work. The sincerity of actions made to implement the policy are questioned and doubted. The SDE's and the underperforming school's understanding of one another is limited. In this type of working relationship there is no commitment to the nature of or solution to the policy problem. Though both parties are obliged to implement the policy, they practice the art of going through the motions without and real policy impact.

"Coming apart and contentious" working relationships have low levels of trust and high levels of involvement. This type of relationship is a type of micromanagement (Scheberle, 1997). The perception of one another is negative. Therefore, any actions and communications are perceived negatively. In this type of working relationship distrust is prevalent, and I would expect to find the school staff feeling threatened by new school accountability policy, and the SDE staff second-guessing information put forth by the school staff. Both parties may feel they need things to change the school's underperforming status, but neither recognizes their dependence upon one another, or neither trusts the other enough to be willing to take the risk of trusting the other party. The SDE and the school staff's self-perceptions are positive, and the perceptions of the other are negative. Intervention from the SDE is seen as a nuisance and interference with the hard work that needs to be accomplished. This is indicative of the fact that both

parties likely agree on the end-goals of new school accountability policy. However, they disagree on the means to this end (Scheberle, 1997). Commitment to the implementation of new school accountability policy is high within the SDE, and this leads to micromanaging of the underperforming school. Commitment to the end-goal may also be high within the underperforming school, but there is disagreement between the two parties how to reach these goals. The resources of time, money and commitment exist, but the recognition of areas of expertise and strengths of both parties would not exist and therefore, undermines the policy implementation efforts. The SDE relationship would be paternalistic in nature and resentment from the school staff grows because the expertise they have to offer is not acknowledged by the SDE.

According to Scheberle (1997) "end-running" may be an "outgrowth of this kind of relationship" (p. 22). End-running is when the SDE staff responsible for implementing new school accountability is "stepped over," and complaints are lodged by the school to their superiors (i.e. Commissioner of SDE, State Board of Education, Legislators, Governor, etc…). This begins a vicious cycle. Having been overstepped, the SDE staff may increase their scrutiny of the underperforming school and identify areas of non-compliance. This in turn, increases the frustration of those at the school and the cycle starts all over again. To alter this cycle Scheberle (1997) states, "[w]ithout dramatic intervention, this kind of relationship has its own force of gravity, destined to generate continued erosion of trust, resentment by all participants, and hypervigilance on the part of the overseer" (p. 22). Without the willingness to risk trusting the other party, this relationship is doomed, much like a nuclear arms race. Someone must take the first, big step toward altering the relationship to break this cycle.

For the purpose of this research the Working Relationship Typology is used to observe movement in the working relationship between the SDE and the underperforming school. The selection of two schools, each from different underperforming review cycles, is important when applying the typology because they contribute to an understanding of how the working relationship changes over time. In the case of Alfred Elementary there is more distance from intervention, and thus the perspectives of educators at Alfred Elementary shed light onto the attitudes over a longer period of time. Babson Elementary educators, on the other hand, provide insight into the fine grain of the early intervention process and allow for a closer examination of changes in the working relationship between the school and the SDE. On the whole, the involvement between the SDE and any single school is low, meaning the working relationship is either cooperative but autonomous or coming apart with avoidance. SDE's and schools do not have a history of direct involvement. As potentially underperforming schools are identified and visited by the SDE, involvement increases and the relationship has the possibility of changing.

Limitations of the Working Relationship Typology

There is a limitation to the application of this typology to the implementation of new school accountability. In Scheberle's research, the typology was used to examine the working relationship between federal and state agencies. Within the United States there is a clear delineation between state and federal government and in this delineation federalism is an ongoing tension between states and the federal government. There is often an accepted dynamic that the state is equal to or above the federal government in this hierarchy and the federal government is simply an organizational tool to accomplish

things that provide a collective good or "economies of scale," that a single state may not as readily accomplish.

These ideas herald back to the birth of this nation and continue to provide balance and tension between the two levels of government (Ellis, 2001). It is for these reasons that laws and policies between states and the federal government can and do conflict with one another. This adds a dimension to a state and federal relationship that is not as prominent in the state and local relationship. In the case of new school accountability the state and local governments are interacting through their public education conduits, the SDE and the school. The states are constitutionally responsible for the delivery of an adequate public education and the schools are seen as agents of the states. Within the public education context the bond between the two is legally more direct and obvious between the state and local entities. Because of the grassroots evolution of the public education system within states (Tyack & Cuban, 1999), and the overarching theme of local control of public schools, however, the tension of control among state and local entities is similar to the tension of control in federal and state relationships.

Trust and Involvement Over Time

Within the loosely structured interviews, and document analysis I looked for evidence of trust and involvement to examine where the working relationship between the SDE and the underperforming school lies within the typology. I expected that the relationship would change over time. Therefore, I selected four points during the early intervention phases that will be examined (see Figure 3.3). These are: 1) after a school has failed to meet the performance criteria and has met the state's strategic criteria for potential underperformance; 2) during the School Panel Review and the release of the

subsequent School Panel Review Report and decision by the Commissioner that the school is indeed underperforming; 3) during the second DOE diagnostic intervention which is called the Fact Finding Review and after the subsequent Fact Finding Review Report is released; and 4) after the first state strategic intervention in the form of technical assistance provided to the school (after the first Performance Improvement Mapping – PIM training).

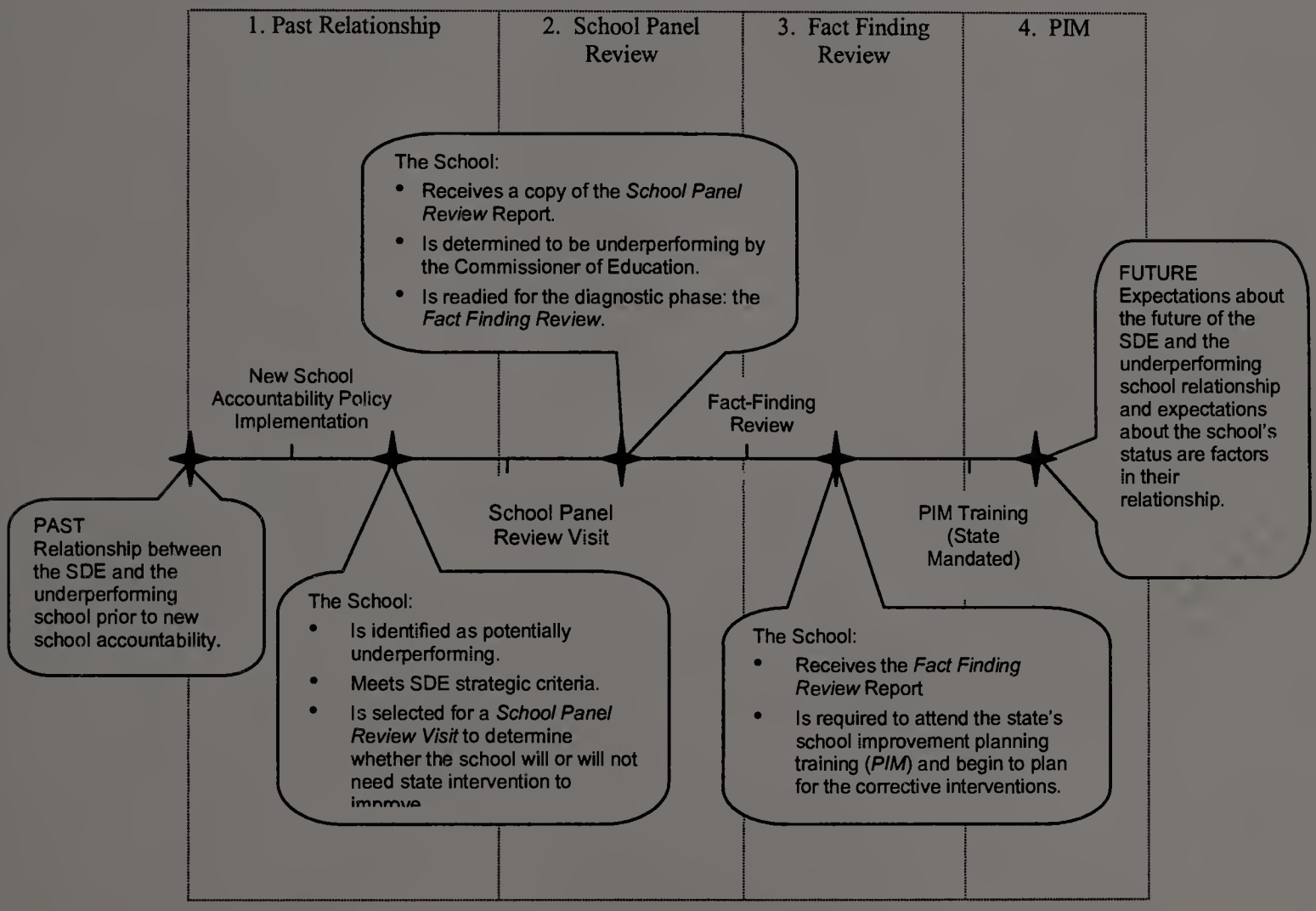

Figure 3.3: Timeline Reflecting Points of Interest during the Study of New School Accountability Policy Implementation

Within the collection methods these four points in time are delineated and used to structure interviews, documents, and observations. Ideally, as a researcher, I would have been part of the process and simultaneously interviewing participants as they were

experiencing these points in time. However, due to the demands placed upon an underperforming school during the early phases, it was not feasible for those in the schools to participate in the study as they were experiencing early intervention. Additionally, it would have been difficult, if not impossible, for me as the sole researcher to conduct the functions of observing and interviewing simultaneously. Therefore, interviews occurred after the state teams and school staffs have been through the early phases of new school accountability and participants were asked to reflect upon their experiences. Relying on state and local reflection upon the past experiences was another limitation of the study because of what Weick (2001) calls "sense making" in which participants impose the present point in time upon reflections to put together a cohesive and consistent path that brings them to where they currently are in the process. Regardless, it provides insight into the process, and allows for participants to reflect upon their experiences and participate in the interview during a less demanding and stressful time period.

Trustworthiness

Throughout the data gathering process, there are methods embedded to increase the trustworthiness of the data gathered. On a grand level, the reason for looking at two schools is to be able to support some of the more generic procedural findings and identify any similarities in response. Still, the generalizability of phenomena across the two school sites is difficult. Selecting two schools and the teachers and principals from those schools may improve the ability to generalize. However, it is better suited as a first step to hone questions for a future larger study. Additionally, the document analysis specific to the school also provides a place to crosscheck information.

It is important not to place the "state" and the "school" on opposite sides of the same coin for many reasons pointed out in the literature review. They are, in a sense, implementation partners. However, though the perspectives of those representing the state and the school are likely different, there are also similarities in experience. After all they are going through the same process together. These points of similarity and departure are the fine details of this research, and are used to validate the trustworthiness of the data gathered.

The last effort to improve trustworthiness is at the participant level. Each interview participant was asked to member-check his or her transcribed interview. This allowed for the possibility to clarify points, change inaccuracies, and further reflect upon their experiences. As a researcher, I used follow-up interviews and correspondence as needed to clarify points and findings that emerge from the data.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

In the following chapters I use the data from documents, observations and participant interviews to improve understanding of the beginning of intervention. Chapter 5 discusses the state level, chapter 6 the local level, and chapter 7 the working relationship between the DOE and the underperforming school. Finally, chapter 8 analyzes the district and its role as the "fixer" of new school accountability during early intervention.

The state level and local level chapters (6 and 7) have a similar format. First, there is a discussion of the role each particular entity (Massachusetts Department of Education, ABC Consulting, Charlesburg District, Alfred Elementary and Babson Elementary) plays during the beginning of state intervention and how individuals within these organizations understand their role in the larger picture (e.g., state level, local level). Then the discussion focuses on the state and local context of early intervention. At each level there are factors that emerged from the data which influence how those at the state and local levels perceive early intervention and how new school accountability policy is implemented.

After gaining familiarity with the state and local levels, I delve into the working relationship between the SDE (DOE) and the underperforming schools (Alfred and Babson Elementary Schools) over the designated time periods (past experience, School Panel Review, Fact Finding Review, PIM) structured within Scheberle's working

relationship typology. The variables of trust and involvement are key to building a concept of the working relationship. By summarizing the working relationship between the state and local level from participants' perspectives, I attempt to track the evolution of the working relationship in terms of Scheberle's typology. Out of the working relationship analysis a discussion about the context, the impact, and the perspectives of the different stakeholders ensues. I conclude by discussing some of the findings that arose from the data and attempt to estimate the point where, from the various perspectives, the incremental or dramatic shift from a deterrent to an enabling process of implementation is perceived and understood at the local level, the assumption being that cooperation between the state and the underperforming school is only possible at that point.

CHAPTER V

THE STATE LEVEL

In this chapter, the state level organizations (DOE and ABC Consulting) findings and perspectives as they relate to and influence new school accountability policy implementation during early intervention are investigated. First, the state level participants, the SDE's (DOE) and the contractor's (ABC Consulting) roles during early intervention are discussed. Then, the context in which the DOE implements new school accountability policy is considered.

Table 5.1 details the state level interview participants and their respective positions. All names have been changed and titles have been simplified (in some instances) to the title under which the person most connects with new school accountability policy implementation.

Table 5.1: Summary of State Level Interview Participants

Level	Name	Title	Organization
State Level: (n=7)	**Massachusetts Department of Education (DOE)** (n=4)		
	Daphne	Director of School Performance Evaluation	Department of Education
	Debra	Administrator for school and district planning support	Department of Education
	Dianne	DOE Coordinator	Department of Education
	Dan	Underperforming School Liaison	Department of Education
	ABC Consulting (n=3)		
	Christie	Director of Resource Development/Panel Chair	ABC Consulting
	Chuck	Panel Chair	ABC Consulting
	Caitlin	Panelist/Report Writer	ABC Consulting

The state level is represented by the SDE and the contractor. In Massachusetts, the SDE is the Department of Education (DOE) and the contractor is ABC Consulting. The DOE is involved in all aspects of school accountability policy and thus brings a broader understanding of the implementation process. ABC Consulting works mainly on the review visits to the schools. Each brings a rich and detailed understanding of the visits, and how the schools receive the state teams.

The SDE: The Massachusetts Department of Education

The part of the Massachusetts Department of Education that manages the beginning of intervention is the School Performance and Evaluation Department within the Accountability and Targeted Assistance Cluster. It is a relatively new entity that has come about because of the added responsibility of holding schools accountable and has been in existence since the late 1990's. The staff members that work within the cluster for the most part have not worked in other parts of the Department of Education (DOE). Many of the employees interviewed have worked at the DOE for less than ten years and began working at the DOE for the specific purpose of working on school accountability and targeted assistance in particular.

Daphne oversees the underperforming school intervention and monitoring within the DOE. She is a veteran of the public education system in a neighboring state and has over 25 years of experience in the classroom, as a district administrator, and as a principal. She has been working on school accountability ever since and describes her work as "…learning how to build the plane as we fly it." She oversees the DOE liaisons

and the relationship with ABC Consulting. Daphne is the leader of underperforming school intervention and is responsible for overseeing the DOE staff and contractors, who work on school accountability, as well as managing the relationship with districts, where the underperforming schools reside.

Dianne is considered an Education Specialist in School Performance Evaluation. She participates in many aspects of accountability and targeted assistance that reach beyond the scope of underperforming school interventions. However, she does participate in the role of a DOE liaison. A DOE liaison is the representative from the DOE who participates on School Panel Reviews and during the Fact Finding Review attends the exit interviews. She is not considered a "monitor," which is the role the DOE liaison takes on for the two years after an underperforming school has developed a state Board of Education approved improvement plan. She has been with the DOE for approximately seven years and clearly has experience in a wide range of initiatives that fall in the realm of school accountability. Her perspective is broader than that of a DOE liaison because she deals with the entire process of early intervention and is a contributor to the design of the system.

A typical DOE liaison would only be responsible for connecting with the underperforming school, managing the logistics of the early intervention process, and maintaining contact with the school principal and team during the school improvement planning process (PIM). After the principal of the underperforming school has presented the school improvement plan before the state's board of education, and the board of education approves the plan, the DOE liaison's role then switches to a monitoring role. An underperforming school is monitored by the DOE liaison for two years. At the end of

the two years a determination about the school's ability to improve based on the achievement over the two years of monitoring is made. At the end of the two years the school can take one of three paths: 1) move out of the underperforming status, 2) be declared chronically underperforming and face strong intervention, or 3) maintain the "monitored" status for a designated amount of time. During the two years of monitoring the DOE liaison visits the school to make sure the principal is accomplishing the goals set forth in the board approved school improvement plan. The visits are an opportunity to identify areas of need within the school and to negotiate the implementation of the improvement plan. The DOE liaison is largely responsible for bringing the voice of the underperforming school to the DOE. They often see themselves as supportive advocates for the underperforming school, who also must be a critical friend to the school as they monitor the implementation of the underperforming school's improvement plan.

Dan is a DOE liaison who has worked with the Department for a little under two years. He was a DOE liaison on two of the School Panel Reviews and the one Fact Finding Review I observed in the Charlesburg School District. The Charlesburg District was his region. However, he left the DOE in the summer of 2004 to become a vice principal at a middle school. Dan's background is in public education, though he did take on some other jobs that were loosely related to education and accountability for a few years. His short tenure as a DOE liaison limited his depth of knowledge, but in many ways Dan is a typical example of a DOE liaison who only stays in the position for a short time.

Debra is less involved with the beginning of intervention, but plays a critical role in the district strategy as the coordinator of the school support specialists (specialist),

which means that she is in charge of all of the specialists in the state. When discussing early intervention, the district's role through the school support specialists came up over and over again as one of the critical components of early intervention. Debra, unlike the others interviewed, has been at the DOE for many years and only in the past four years began to work in the accountability unit of the DOE.

The Massachusetts Department of Education's Role

> There is an old adage out there that the greatest joke in the world is, 'Hi, I'm here from the DOE, and I'm here to help you.' (Daphne, DOE)

The quote above is often heard when talking about the DOE. It typifies the distance between the DOE and the local district and school, and denotes the old role of the DOE, which required less of the educational/practitioner knowledge and expertise and more administration, data collection, and compliance expertise. It captures the challenges DOE faces when implementing new school accountability policy. The DOE must build relationships where there were none, and simultaneously change the perception locals have of the state as a non-influential and less than helpful part of the education system.

Despite the general feeling among those in the lower echelons of a state's loosely coupled public education system, the Massachusetts Department of Education has attempted to implement new school accountability policy that conveys a message of support to the underperforming school by saying,

> …[W]e know this is hard. We understand the challenges you face, but you can do it a little better, we think. And, we're going to show you how. We think, we don't have all these answers, but we do think there is room there for us to work together on behalf of kids. And, the message is this isn't about you, it's about these kids. (Daphne, DOE)

By removing the onus of blame those within the school feel, Daphne has created an implementation process that does not place personal blame upon educators in the school. Rather, it is intended to redirect and refocus efforts within the school so that the educators within the school move toward improvement rather than having early intervention paralyze them. From the start the state representatives send the message that they do not have the answers by showing respect for the expertise of the educators in the school, and by conveying sincerity and honesty when communicating with them. All efforts concentrate on changing the idea of new school accountability policy from a deterrent to an enabling system.

According to Dan, at every turn the educators in the school are told that school improvement is reliant upon their efforts. He emphasizes the point by stating,

> That's crystal clear. There's just no two ways about it that your school has to pull itself up. You're the one that's going to do this work. You're the one that's going to carry this forward. And, it's not done in such a way that it's threatening or anything like that. (Dan, DOE)

Throughout the DOE, those in contact with the school emphasize that the educators within the school are going to improve the school. The enabling message sent to principals and teachers symbolizes the respect the DOE has for the work they do within the schools, and it shows that the DOE staff recognize that the classroom expertise exists within the school. Dan mentions that the message is sent without threat to those in the school. Rather, the approach is designed to reinvigorate and refocus the internal accountability mechanisms within the school so that they meet the end goal of improving educational outcomes.

Consistently, interview participants from the DOE reiterated that building a relationship with the district and the school is a central focus of early intervention. Dianne discusses the type of relationship the DOE wants with the underperforming school, and how the DOE negotiates cooperation with those in the underperforming school.

> We try to establish a really professional, pragmatic approach. That there's a job that we have to do, and this is how we have to get it done. And, we try to be as sensitive to the school as we can – the people in the school as we can – because we understand it can be a difficult situation for them, and it can be disruptive for them. So, we try to be as sensitive as we can and as professional as we can. (Dianne, DOE)

Once again, sincerity and respect for those within the school is ingrained in the DOE's language and process. Accommodation of the school principal and staff are made at every turn in the early intervention process. The respect and professionalism with which they approach the school staff is proof in actions that the DOE is interested in partnering with the school to achieve a commonly desired end goal. The culture within the DOE unit responsible for underperforming schools is that of support and enabling. The Director, Daphne puts it best,

> …I think as [early intervention's] premise it has always been really focused on support. Despite the fact that school performance evaluation is really an accountability measure, where for the first time the state is making judgments about the quality of what is happening in the schools…but I think that our perspective has always been to do so as a way to help schools. (Daphne, DOE)

The bottom line within the DOE is support for the underperforming schools and designing a system of early intervention that gives the principal and teachers in the school the tools to analyze how they will improve educational outcomes. Throughout the process, the DOE staff recognize their need to partner with the school, and that after the

underperforming school principal and teachers are given the tools, true improvement relies on the internal expertise and ability to gain the expertise of the teachers in the classroom. Knowing that every piece of the public education system is needed to focus upon school improvement means the DOE does not automatically take a command and control style implied by the legislation. Rather, the DOE's process works within and alters the public education system by injecting support, placing importance on outcomes, and respecting the professional educators within the schools and classrooms.

The Contractor: ABC Consulting

ABC Consulting is the contractor that supports the state's underperforming school accountability efforts. At the higher levels of ABC Consulting, the staff have worked in partnership to develop an early intervention system for Massachusetts that is supportive of school improvement efforts by diagnosing school challenges with a team of experts (panelists) and developing a system of data analysis that directs school improvement efforts (PIM). Beyond working on the development of the early intervention process, the role of ABC Consulting is narrowly focused on a portion of the beginning of intervention: the School Panel Reviews and the Fact Finding Reviews. The purpose of using an outside consultant is to bring the skills and experience of an organization that works primarily on school accountability evaluations and school improvement initiatives within schools and districts across the nation. ABC Consulting has clients ranging from other state departments of education to city districts. Using ABC Consulting's services on an as needed basis expands the capacity and skills of the DOE.

ABC Consulting's specialization and expertise have helped to design the "beginning of intervention" implementation for the Massachusetts DOE. The contractor and the DOE alike describe the relationship as a partnership. The contractor develops plans and the DOE has the final approval on them. Additionally, the contractor has the flexibility to bring in experts to chair the panels and to write the reports. These experts generally have a public school leadership background as retired principals and superintendents. This type of background and experience is generally not found among state level DOE staff (McDermott, Berger, Bowles, Brooks, Churchill, & Effrat, 2001).

Three members of ABC Consulting were interviewed for this study. Each of the interview participants represents a different aspect of the consulting group, but covers all of the roles that ABC Consulting plays with regard to the school accountability process in Massachusetts. Christie manages the role of the contractor with the DOE and partners with the DOE by participating and contributing to the development and evolution of the beginning of intervention. She has a background as a teacher in middle schools and is a veteran teacher of the public education system in a neighboring state. Not only does she help to develop the process, but she also provides logistical support and serves as a chair on both School Panel and Fact Finding Reviews. Her insights, therefore, are much more connected to the DOE perspective than to that of the schools because she has regular contact with the leaders within the DOE and the director (Daphne) in particular.

Chuck is a retired principal, who subcontracts with ABC Consulting. He works on more than just the Massachusetts school accountability project for ABC Consulting. When he is working on Massachusetts school accountability, he serves as a Chair for both School Panel Reviews and Fact Finding Reviews. He has been working on school

accountability issues for over three years and participates in the annual training that ABC Consulting provides to its employees and subcontractors. His perspective on school accountability is that of an outsider to the school accountability policy, but he has experience in the public education system under the education reform initiatives of which school accountability is part. He has a particular focus upon the school. His contact with the DOE is limited. He reports directly to Christie, and the information about the state process he possesses comes from her as well as from his experiences visiting underperforming schools.

Caitlin is a former special education teacher, who is currently working outside of the classroom. She is also a subcontractor with ABC Consulting. She has participated as a panel member on School Panel and Fact Finding Reviews for two years and in the most recent year began subcontracting with ABC Consulting to work closely with the Chairs and to write the reports that are submitted to DOE. The reports she writes for ABC Consulting are handed off to DOE. The DOE liaison and Daphne edit them as they see fit. The reports are used to make determinations about a school's status of underperformance and particular areas that need to be addressed for improvement. Like Chuck, Caitlin reports to Christie and gets most of her information about school accountability from ABC Consulting trainings and from her experiences as a panelist on underperforming school reviews.

ABC Consulting's Role

ABC Consulting's role is to chair and conduct the School Panel and Fact Finding Reviews, write the first draft of the reports from these visits, and at the higher levels of the organization partner with the DOE to develop the early intervention process. The

DOE has partnered with ABC Consulting to take advantage of the organizations experience in managing school accountability and school improvement initiatives in other parts of the country and to access the expertise of school practitioners (e.g., principals, superintendents) on an as needed basis. Because of their experience working with districts and states around the nation, ABC Consulting has played an important role in the design of early intervention. Christie describes the relationship.

> Originally, back in the early days we were developers of the protocol. So that we were, you know, we were invited to provide support over the summer to develop a process for not just visiting schools, but for guiding the improvement planning process which is what schools undergo once they're declared underperforming. So, we have been developers of the process, as well as, you know, conductors of the visits. (Christie, ABC Consulting)

> … So,… it's been a very collaborative relationship with respect to the DOE. (Christie, ABC Consulting)

By collaborative relationship, Christie is referring to the how ABC Consulting has worked with the DOE to develop the process, and how they work in partnership to improve and change the implementation process of early intervention.

ABC Consulting's most important role is to build the capacity of the DOE by visiting the schools, gathering the practitioners, screening panelist candidates, writing the reports, and handling the finances of paying the subcontractors. ABC Consulting pulls in expertise from a variety of school settings and ultimately leads and enhances the breadth and depth of the panels during the School Panel and Fact Finding Reviews.

In observations and discussions about the role of ABC Consulting, it is clear that the role of the contractor is important for more than just expanding the state's capacity. They bring in experienced educators, who are veterans of the public education system. The members of ABC Consulting are some of the first people that those in the school see.

Essentially they are the "face" of the state because they are working on the frontline during the beginning of intervention. Their role lends credibility to the DOE from the perspective of those in the school and potentially the district. ABC Consulting requires the Chair of a panel to be someone who has been in the trenches of the public education system (e.g., retired superintendent, principal), and at the very least it is someone who has worked in the classroom. In most cases educators in the schools believed the ABC Consultants were employees of the DOE. At the district level, administrators were more familiar with the process and understood that ABC Consultants were contractors of the state. The consultants never denied being external contractors, but the message was not forthcoming, so educators in the underperforming schools tended to assume they were DOE employees because they did not know otherwise.

Because they are the "face" of the state during early school intervention, it is valuable to understand how those that work for ABC Consulting view the state's role during early intervention. Rather than being an independent and separate evaluator, ABC Consulting is presented as the state and acts as a partner of the state.

> We… make sure it's clear that we are an agent of the state and that we are doing the state's business here. That the state's business allows us to offer you from another perspective… what issues you might want to address and how you might want to deploy your energies and time. (Christie, ABC Consulting)

The role of the ABC Consultants, as they see it, is to represent the state and provide a fair assessment of what is occurring in the underperforming school so that the DOE is able to make a determination about the school. Still, as representatives of the state they work within their unique situations, and they are melding their own organizational goals with their client's goals.

> With respect to the schools, we have a personal goal that even though the client may be an agency or organization or foundation, we have a strong belief that if our work is to be, our work has to be useful to the school. In some way or fashion it has to be... useful and hopefully meaningful to the school... [Y]ou know we have the extra responsibility that we hold ourselves to – an extra standard that we hold ourselves to. So, with respect to the schools our target, [or] the reason we do so much training on interpersonal relationships is that, you know, we want them to know that we're there. We're there for the state. We're conducting the state's business, you know, business on behalf of the state, but... we want to do it in a way that [people in the school] can... nod their heads when we leave and say, "Yeah, you're right. You know you got it. You have described us correctly." (Christie, ABC Consulting)

In congruence with the DOE's expressed desire for a cooperative working relationship with those in the school, ABC Consulting as an organization places a priority on developing a supportive relationship with the principal and teachers within the underperforming school. The "extra responsibility" Christie talks about is concentrated on forming a positive working relationship with the underperforming school on behalf of the state.

In fact, ABC Consulting's role of representing the DOE in the reviews of underperforming schools is taken quite seriously. For each consultant, on a personal level, there is a clearly expressed empathy for the school and the difficult situation it faces. In many instances when they are Chairs of the reviews, they find themselves making those in the school comfortable with the process and letting them know that no matter what happens the process can only improve the current situation. Much of their effort is concentrated upon the school and the reaction of those within the school, which requires them to pay close attention during visits and interviews and to model the counseling/empathetic behavior to the practitioners on the panels. As Chuck states, "The thing that ABC Consulting does well is that it emphasizes that this is a human process,

you know? That the relationships that you create or fail to create…are really pivotal to everything that goes on."

The DOE and ABC Consulting have teamed up to implement new school accountability policy during the beginning of intervention. Their priorities of developing a working relationship between the state, the underperforming school, and the district, and balancing support and accountability during implementation, reveal a symbiotic partnership between the two. The evolution of new school accountability policy is indication of a continuous improvement effort that includes information gathered from state and local feedback. The state's willingness to empower the local district and underperforming school during early intervention shows a sincere desire to work within the existing public education system.

The State Context

The staff from the Massachusetts Department of Education Accountability and Targeted Assistance Cluster (DOE) developed an early school intervention process that puts the idea of building relationships between the state and local levels at the center of new school accountability in Massachusetts. For the DOE the goal of building a working relationship is to change the perception of new school accountability from a deterrent to an enabling system as perceived by those at the local level. Ultimately the DOE wants to empower the underperforming school principal and teachers to take responsibility for school improvement. The goals of building a working relationship with those in the school and changing the perception of school accountability policy is to improve educational outcomes and to avoid further state interventions.

Relationship building takes time, energy, and resources that are in short supply at the state level. Therefore, the DOE has implemented several strategies to expand and balance the state's capacity, all of which put relationships between the state, the district and the school as a top priority. Using contractors to expand their expertise during reviews, and partnering with district superintendents have broadened the expertise levels and human resources working with the underperforming schools. Relationship building with the underperforming school further engages and empowers the principal and teachers within the underperforming school. Additionally, DOE has also involved the districts that oversee the underperforming schools. District superintendent involvement and the DOE's district based school support specialist (specialists) strategy improves and expands DOE's capacity to work with underperforming schools. Simultaneously, it helps the district, which is the entity responsible for school improvement, by providing additional, focused resources for school improvement.

Though the DOE is best suited to implement "one best system," the relationship centered early intervention process allows for accommodations and negotiations within the unique local contexts. Partnerships with the urban school principals and urban districts leaders keep the DOE administrators apprised of local needs, provide feedback to reform systematic problems with implementation over time, and maintain a common understanding among state and local partners about the end goal of policy implementation. The strategy led to the development of a common framework for implementation that gives locals control and discretion over how the policy is implemented and negotiated at the district and school levels. In a sense, rather than

taking the expected "one best system" approach, the DOE has taken a "one best framework" approach.

The purpose of a "framework" type of approach is that it respects and leaves room for local expertise and authority aimed at accomplishing the intent of new school accountability policy, to improve educational outcomes in all schools. It allows for negotiation of new school accountability policy implementation, and perhaps more importantly, it is evidence of the DOE's recognition of their dependence upon the local staff of underperforming schools and district to mobilize themselves around improvement efforts that are designed and therefore owned by the local educators. In the face of limited capacity and expertise to implement a deterrent system, the DOE (and ABC Consulting) must rely upon the partnership with the underperforming schools and the existing educational expertise at the local level.

For those at the state level, the idea that real change needs to occur at the local school level pervades all explanations of new school accountability policy implementation. Implicitly, it reveals an understanding among DOE administrators that they are dependent upon the local underperforming school and district for improvement in the educational outcomes. State level interviewees did see the importance of cooperation during the beginning of intervention. However, state level participants did not express a dependence upon the local level. Rather, they couched the need for cooperation as an essential ingredient to supporting the underperforming school and ensuring those at the local level are appropriately taking on their responsibility to provide an adequate education to students within their schools and district.

State and District Relationship

Throughout early intervention the underperforming school and the DOE are forging a new working relationship, but not without the facilitation of the district. In Massachusetts the district is a central component of early intervention. In earlier waves of new school accountability policy implementation in other states, the relationship between the state and schools was forged separately from the district. Consequently, it leaps over the traditional SDE-district-school hierarchy of the public educations system. In Massachusetts, however, the district is the key partner during early intervention. The DOE Coordinator for the school support specialists explains the decision to make the district such an integral part of early intervention.

> [Other state educational leaders] said they sent people in and the school would get better while they were there, but … they had no confidence that the school could stay better without their presence. So, that was one of the reasons why we decided that if we built capacity at the district level, there was a closer-in relationship between the district and the school. And…the school would have somebody at the district level who would be there for much longer than we would if we sent somebody from [the DOE]. And besides, somebody at the district level would also help the school, would be somebody who understood the culture of the district and would be able to try and work within that and make changes within the district that would not only effect the particular low performing school, but would have impact on other schools in the district.
>
> (Debra, DOE)

The DOE implements a district focused strategy for school improvement based on the challenges faced by those SDE's that went before Massachusetts, and in an effort to sustain improvements within the school and share the improvement strategies across the district. Additionally, they see the district based strategy as a way of getting at the problem of having to balance the number of schools that are underperforming and the number of schools the state can intervene in during a single year. By placing a person in

the district (school support specialist), whose sole responsibility is school improvement, the district can integrate the improvement methods learned through the state's early intervention, in the schools that are not selected for state review, but still designated as in need based on student test results.

Professional courtesy and respect from the DOE toward the district abounds in all the conversations with the state level participants. Rather than jumping over the district to work with the underperforming school, the DOE has integrated the district or enlisted the district to be a partner in the school improvement endeavor. In fact, the bulk of the negotiations of early intervention occur between the DOE and the district. DOE staff members' regular contact with district superintendents and specialists creates a forum for negotiation of the implementation process on a regular and informal basis. The evolution of the policy implementation process is a good indication that the DOE staff listens to the local level and has embarked on developing a positive working relationship with the school. Consequently, because the district is in the middle of negotiations between the DOE and the underperforming school, the district has become an integral part of the working relationship between the DOE and the local underperforming school.

Building and Balancing State Capacity

Capacity limitations are cited frequently by state level participants, especially when discussing the beginning of intervention, and have at least partially shaped the way new school accountability is implemented and negotiated between the state and local levels.

With regard to the early intervention visits, the DOE has innovatively expanded its capacity by using a contractor (ABC Consulting) to provide expertise during the early

intervention school visits. As the face of the state in the eyes of the school, ABC Consulting serves a special role in developing the working relationship between the school and the state. ABC Consulting has national expertise in school accountability and school improvement initiatives. The staff are experienced and regularly trained with priority placed on the human aspect of school accountability. They see building a "critical friend" type of relationship as essential to the school accountability process. A combination of honest feedback and understanding helps to push and empower school leadership to move forward. With a wide variety of K-12 educational backgrounds, the consultants from ABC Consulting are selected for their intuitive sense of how to work with school leaders respectfully and sincerely. ABC Consulting is an integral participant in the design of the early intervention process and offers the DOE an expanded capacity to visit and provide in-depth diagnoses of underperforming schools.

As another capacity expansion measure, the DOE uses the working relationship with the local district and underperforming school as the vehicle to encourage and empower local change. Apart from creating more harmony during implementation, a cooperative working relationship helps the DOE expand its capacity and resource limitations by partnering with the underperforming schools, hence relying on and empowering the professional educators within the schools. To expand capacity and support the schools the DOE has enlisted the district's help and thus tapped into district level expertise and capacity. Through regular contact with the urban superintendents, who have the bulk of the underperforming schools within their districts, and by a strategy of embedding district-based school support specialists to provide targeted assistance to underperforming schools, the state has increased its interaction with the schools.

Engaging the district as a partner in supporting underperforming schools additionally gets the district invested in a school's improvement. This investment is critical, as the district, according to all state level interview participants, is the entity that is ultimately responsible for an underperforming school's improvement.

Even with the capacity building measures the DOE takes during early intervention, it still must engage in capacity balancing efforts. The most superficial glance at the number of schools in need compared with the number of schools the state intervenes in places the question of capacity front and center. Simply by comparing the number of federal *No Child Left Behind Act, 2001* (NCLB) designated schools "in need of improvement, in "corrective action," and in "restructuring" within Massachusetts to the number of state intervention or underperforming schools within the state presents the question. Between 2000 and 2004, the state officially visited 61 schools and declared 26 underperforming. In Massachusetts, according to NCLB designations as of the 2003-2004 "Cycle III" 324 schools were "in need of improvement," 27 school were in "corrective action," and 25 more schools were in "restructuring" (Perlman, 2004). There are 376 schools, according to federal guidelines, that are at the very least in need of support and very worst in restructuring. Still, during the same 2004 underperforming school review cycle, the DOE was only able to visit 16 schools (the most it has ever visited in a single year) and found eight to be underperforming. Thus, in 2004 the state had the capacity to visit approximately 4.26% of the schools designated as needing improvement or worse, and only intervened in 2.13% of them. In all of the years the

DOE has been implementing new school accountability policy only 61 or 6.38% of the schools designated as in need have been the target of state intervention.[1]

Strategic criteria are not only a way of looking beyond poor test scores in a school and at other influential dimensions of schooling. They are also how the DOE manages its capacity to intervene in schools. Mintrop (2003) found that states use a variety of methods to match the SDE's capacity with the numbers of schools in need. Maryland typifies the type of strategic criteria methodology used in Massachusetts. In these cases, the SDE selects the worst of the worse schools as targets of intervention by prioritizing schools that have the declines in improvement and poor overall ratings. Additionally, in Massachusetts, the DOE relies upon the district superintendent's professional judgment or belief that a state visit would be good for an underperforming school. By matching school performance and professional judgments of the district superintendent to the DOE's capacity to support schools the number of schools intervened in by the state is determined.

There is some pride in the fact that the DOE does not only use test scores to determine whether a school should be visited or declared underperforming. According to the Director of School Performance and Evaluation at the DOE (Daphne), the state looks at more than just test scores to intervene in a school, which puts a heavy demand upon the DOE's constrained resources. Consequently, no more than 16 schools have been visited in a cycle. The DOE is forced to look initially at all of the schools in need. In due course the DOE depends upon strategic criteria to determine a school's needs in an effort to

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[1] Because the Massachusetts school accountability policy precedes the NCLB legislation, it is difficult to provide an exact estimate of the number of schools that fall into the NCLB designated categories. The designations are a moving target from year to year and changes within a given school can alter these determinations. It should be noted that since NCLB, the DOE has aligned their school performance criteria to suit the requirements of the federal legislation.

balance the state's resources and capacity with the needs of the most severely underperforming schools across the state.

The general feeling among DOE administrators and ABC Consultants is that the DOE does the best it can in balancing capacity with limited resources. One way the DOE balances capacity with need is to carefully select the "right people," who represent the appropriate attitude and approach to the implementation of new school accountability policy. The "right people" are essential to accomplishing the difficult job of implementing new school accountability.

> Daphne has been very skillful in getting DOE personnel, people on her staff, although, you know turnover rate is incredibly high just because of other conditions that are beyond Daphne's control. But she's been very clear in making that the focus of their work. (Christie, ABC Consulting)

By looking for the "right people" the DOE assures quality and consistency when implementing new school accountability policy. The right people for DOE must be able to balance the punitive and supportive roles the DOE plays when negotiating new school accountability implementation within a particular underperforming school. Christie believes the DOE has been successful at getting the right people to ensure that the DOE's message of support and desire for a positive working relationship with the school is clearly articulated. As Christie notes, for that to happen support has to be the overriding message.

> That [the DOE staff are] there to support the schools, and if what they're doing isn't supportive, if the schools aren't responding, then ok, they can be a little stricter and more demanding, but… the first step is to do the supportive. So, I think they've been very good given the limitations. They've been less effective than they'd like to be just because they don't have the personnel and time. (Christie, ABC Consulting)

Balancing the role of support and enforcement is a challenge for the DOE according to ABC Consultants. In many ways they see the state's enforcement role grow as one moves higher up the DOE's hierarchy of administrators. At the bottom of the hierarchy are the DOE people who have the closest relationship with the underperforming school, the DOE liaisons. The DOE liaison is the school's contact at the DOE and eventually the person who monitors the school's improvement after early intervention. Because of their direct relationship with the school, the DOE liaison tends to be an advocate for the school. As Christie describes,

> [The DOE liaisons] do tend to align themselves with the school. So…when we've had some DOE liaisons engaged in conversations afterwards, they tend to present an overly rosy picture. They defend the school's actions in many ways, despite, you know, other evidence that suggests that…such is not formerly the case. (Christie, ABC Consulting)

Christie states that the DOE liaisons are "going native" because they are so close with the school they start to defend the school, and she suggests they become overly supportive.

As advocates for the underperforming schools, DOE liaisons serve the school and the DOE by connecting the two. The DOE liaisons become advocates at the state level by providing the school perspective for decisions the DOE makes about the school. By connecting the DOE and the underperforming school directly, the unique circumstances and challenges of a particular underperforming school are taken into account. The DOE liaisons' supportive advocacy of the underperforming schools ensures that the implementation process is checked and makes sense within the context of an underperforming school.

On the other hand, the supportive nature can sometimes cause DOE liaisons to paint a rosy picture of the activities within an underperforming school, and thus may give

the diagnostic intervention less power to cause change in the school. DOE liaisons are charged with connecting to the schools and supporting improvements. While they recognize that they must also hold schools accountable for improvement, their dual role contributes to the DOE's ability to change the implementation of new school accountability from one which is deterrent to one which is enabling for the underperforming school.

In some senses "going native" (Christie, ABC Consulting) can help the DOE liaison to collaborate with underperforming school principals and teachers as well as district administrators. As one moves further up the chain of command in the DOE, however, it seems that the administrators tend to be stronger advocates for accountability rather than support. Comments from Daphne indicate that the DOE is organized to play both roles intentionally, so it is not surprising to find that the DOE staff at the bottom of the organization (DOE liaisons) tend to be more supportive toward the school than they are at holding the school accountable. As you move up the hierarchy within the DOE, the degree to which the staff holds a school accountable increases as the support decreases. Throughout the organization, support and accountability exist. They even have a symbiotic relationship, with one looming larger than the other depending upon the situation and the level in the hierarchy which the DOE administrator works.

Evolution or Negotiation of Policy Implementation

Under the constraints of limited capacity the state, the district, and the underperforming schools must work to fit the policy into their organizations so that it makes sense for their organizations. The evolution of the early intervention (policy implementation) is evidence of Lipsky's (1977) and Elmore's (1979) suggestion that

policy implementation is negotiated as it is implemented to better fit the organization. Changes in the process and understanding at the state and local level have contributed to significant changes in the perceptions the DOE, the district, and the underperforming school have about one another and thus have altered the way the organizations function together within the public education system.

From the beginning the DOE has established a "culture" of support that pervades new school accountability policy implementation. During early intervention, each of the partners (contractors and the districts) are encouraged by administrators at the highest levels of the DOE to adhere to a common tone of support and sincerity when implementing new school accountability policy. Christie discusses the DOE's earnest desire to work with underperforming schools to improve the existing public education system.

> You know, [the DOE staff] are always working a gazillion hours to do everything possible to support the schools. And, you know, that's a culture. My personal belief is that Daphne is responsible for that culture. …[S]he surrounds her people with the notion that, you know, that their job is to be the strongest support for the schools. …That's what they see themselves as, but they also see the constraints of not having enough people to do exactly, to do it right and to do it well by their standards. So, there's a level of frustration that I sense because they know that there are more things that could be done. There are more things that should be done, but they just don't have the number of hours or the number of people to do it. (Christie, ABC Consulting)

Even within the capacity limitations, the supportive culture and the right people to carry out the support to the schools has led to changes in the state and school relationship. A sign of the change in state and local relationship is in the difference between the reaction toward the state when school accountability policy was first implemented (2000) and the more recent years. The DOE and ABC Consulting staff members recount the

reaction of schools toward early state intervention teams as "defensive" during the early years. Daphne discusses the change.

> ... the more practitioners we involved in our School [Panel] Review process who got to participate, understand what it was we were looking for, come to a training where I was able to explain to them what we were really trying to do here. So, as the word got out, people although it still makes them very uptight, have become much more accepting. (Daphne, DOE)

The state teams still encounter nervousness and milder levels of defensiveness during school visits, but note a remarkable difference and lessening of the defensiveness. The relationship and expectations between the state and the underperforming school have changed since the first years of implementation. More than likely it is because the frequency of early intervention has increased, information about the process has spread among the lower ranks of the public education system, and because the district, especially the specialists, provides additional support and information to those within the underperforming schools.

Over the many cycles of underperforming school reviews, the behavior and policy implementation methods of the DOE have bestowed a new, and more cooperative starting point for early intervention. Beyond the local level changes, those in the DOE believe these changes have come about because of the clear and sincere message the DOE sends to the school about needing them as partners during implementation combined with the strategy of expanding their capacity to support schools with the help of the district superintendents and specialists. As Daphne states when referring to the district school support specialists, "They're a bridge." The school support specialists provide an important and consistent connection between the DOE, the district, and the underperforming school.

Specific changes in the early intervention process framework since new school accountability policy has been implemented are another outcome of negotiations. One important change has been the timing of state visits to underperforming schools. Originally the underperforming schools went through school panel reviews in the springtime, attended a Performance Improvement Measurement (PIM) training session over the summer, and were visited for a Fact Finding Review in the fall. In these cases, the state teams often found that dramatic changes were made in between the Panel Review and the Fact Finding Review because of a summer of planning and staff changes. Additionally, the original timing of early intervention meant that the school teams at PIM were heading into a planning session without the diagnostic information from the Fact Finding Review. The timeline has been changed in the last two years because the DOE listened to the districts and schools and felt it would be better to have the Fact Finding Review report information for the underperforming school team during the PIM training. Therefore, last year the Fact Finding Reviews were held in the later spring (May/June). In the 2005 underperforming review cycle, the DOE is altering the timeline even further. The School Panel Reviews will be conducted in the fall of the school year, and the Fact Finding Reviews will be held in the early spring to allow more time for the school to plan for improvement.

Another alteration to the school accountability framework is the decision to have DOE liaisons have territories (much like sales people), which enhances their ability to develop relationships with a district and a school. Because the liaison is often visiting more than one school within a district, there is a greater familiarity with the district players. On occasions the ABC Consulting panelists mentioned, and I observed, the

DOE liaison justify or translate information provided by a superintendent or district representative for a School Panel or Fact Finding Panel Review based on "knowing" him or her. It suggests that early intervention policy strengthens the relationship between the DOE and the underperforming school, and perhaps even more so contributes to a stronger working relationship between the DOE and the district. The DOE liaisons become an advocate of the district, and by the time of the Fact Finding Review, a relationship with the principal makes them an advocate for the school.

In the most recent year there has been an attempt by the DOE to have ABC Consulting use the same (ABC Consulting) Chair for an individual school's School Panel and Fact Finding Reviews, provided there was no conflict between the principal/school staff and the chair during the School Panel Review. State level participants report that using the same Chair (ABC Consultant) on both the School Panel and Fact Finding Reviews allows for a more in-depth Fact Finding visit (diagnosis), because there is already some familiarity with the school, beyond simply having read the School Panel Review report. Additionally the ABC Consultants, who go on both School Panel and Fact Finding Reviews, indicated that when the principal and staff within a school see a familiar face it puts the staff at ease and is helpful in allaying any fear and/or anxiety within the school.

Another reason for using the same Chair (ABC Consulting) on the School Panel and Fact Finding Reviews may be because the length of time of the Fact Finding Review has been shortened from the original 10 days, to 4 days and now to three which has been attributed to limited financial resources. Having the same Chair at both reviews shortens the time it takes those in the school to warm up to the state panel. In fact Christie and

Chuck from ABC Consulting stated that with the change there is not as much of a learning curve with the process and that the reports are likely comparable to the reports developed during the longer visits of the past.

Conclusion

From the perspective of the state DOE and ABC Consulting, cooperation and a working relationship are at the heart of the early intervention. Initially, the positive and cooperative approach was surprising based on the deterrent nature of the new school accountability policy language. However, it quickly became apparent that after the deterrent threats of new school accountability were realized, that to continue down a path where threat was the motivation would quickly undermine any real efforts to improve educational outcomes within the underperforming schools. Deterrent systems of implementation imply that expertise exists primarily at the top of the organization.

Rather, a state public education system is loosely coupled with professional educators (and expertise) at the bottom levels of the organization. The real challenge seems to be bridging the state's external accountability system and the school's internal accountability system, which is controlled by the professional educators within the underperforming school. Consequently, the DOE's switch from the deterrent nature of the policy language to an enabling system of implementation that incorporates the professional judgment, persuasion, and negotiation of the policy to fit the context of the organization is a better implementation choice.

An enabling system of implementation is the type of implementation traditionally found in the public education system, but more than tradition, the capacity limitations at

the state level force the DOE to alter its approach to the beginning of intervention. Deterrent systems of intervention require centralized resources for effective implementation (Bardach, 1977). Enabling systems require a strong sense of professional duty as incentive and motivation to implement policy (Bardach, 1977). Because the DOE has been able to intervene in less that 10% of the schools that are underperforming in Massachusetts, efforts to expand capacity are the driving force behind the state's implementation of new school accountability policy.

Capacity limitations at the state level create a dependence upon the educators within the underperforming school to take on their own improvement efforts within the one best framework of implementation the DOE had developed. Enabling the professional educators within the underperforming school is a primary goal for the DOE. By developing educator capacity to address the issues causing underperformance (through the PIM process), the DOE is imbuing educators by providing them with capacity and tools to develop their own improvement strategies.

Early intervention strategies improve the DOE's credibility in the eyes of the educators within the underperforming schools, and they encourage a mutually respectful type of relationship with the school. ABC Consulting plays a critical role in enhancing the credibility of the DOE by providing experienced (and often retired) administrators and staff mixed with practitioner panelists who are trained to put relationship building and respect at the center of their process. Also, the DOE liaisons are encouraged to be supportive toward the principal and educators, rather than critical of the educators within the school. These efforts help to build a positive working relationship between the DOE and the underperforming school from the start.

Throughout the state level, support and accountability have a symbiotic relationship during the beginning of intervention. Though much of early intervention is based on supporting the school and equipping educators with the tools they need to develop improvement strategies, there is still an element of accountability which the DOE staff use as they see fit. DOE staff at the lower levels of the organization tend to be more supportive and are encouraged to be supportive by their superiors. At the higher levels of the organization, however, the DOE administrators realize they must be strong with educators in the underperforming schools and hold them accountable. The dual role and relationship can be difficult to juggle, but throughout the process is clearly sympathetic to the hard working educator in the underperforming school.

The DOE has partnered with the districts to expand the state and local capacity to intervene in underperforming schools. By providing the districts with school support specialists, the DOE has expanded the district's ability and vicariously the DOE's ability to intervene in schools (through the work of the specialists). By providing specialists with regular training and developing an informal and formal communication network at the district level, the DOE receives feedback and is able to negotiation the implementation of policy so that it fits the local context. Partnering between the two has been made easier because the district accountability office is outside of the DOE. So the DOE support efforts toward the district are seen as genuine without strings of accountability (at least by DOE) attached to them.

The DOE is dependent upon a positive working relationship, or at least not a negative working relationship, with the underperforming school during the beginning of intervention to impact improvement and avoid the strong interventions that the DOE has

even less capacity to implement. DOE and ABC Consulting seem to implicitly recognize the dependency. Credibility offered by the experts from ABC Consulting, and support offered by the DOE liaisons, are the olive branches offered to the local district administrators and the underperforming school educators in an effort to initiate a positive relationship. The beginning of intervention brings with it many shifts in perception of new school accountability policy. Clearly, from the state perspective intervention brings a switch from a deterrent system of implementation to one which enables educators to make real changes after receiving state led capacity building professional development. The most important change for those in the school is to understand that the DOE is implementing "one best framework" rather than one best system. As an organization it is more than willing to negotiate the implementation of new school accountability policy, in fact, the DOE staff expect the educators in the underperforming school to take on the responsibility for school improvement.

CHAPTER VI

THE LOCAL LEVEL

The original definition of the "local level" in this study was the underperforming schools, meaning the perceptions of the principals and teachers from within the two schools selected for study. A surprise, however, was the influential role the district plays. Specifically, the engagement of the district by the DOE administrators, and to a lesser degree the principals and faculty members in the underperforming schools, pushes the district to spend additional resources of time and attention on the underperforming school. In the end, the district is at the center of new school accountability implementation, plays a critical role during early intervention. Thus, the district had to be included as part of the definition of the local level.

In many ways the district is encouraged by the DOE to provide the bridge or play a "fixer" role (Bardach, 1977) in the implementation of the Massachusetts Education Reform Act, 1993 and NCLB during the beginning of intervention between the state and local levels. The local level is where new school accountability policy implementation is negotiated, and the district administrators become the diplomatic ambassadors working on behalf of the state and the schools. The district staff (specifically the school support specialists) are the negotiators and translators for the implementation of state policy into a district an underperforming school's unique local context.

Table 6.1 is a list of the local level interview participants and their organizational affiliations. All names of individuals and the organizations have been changed to protect their privacy.

Table 6.1: Charlesburg Public School District Local Level Participants

District Administrators		(n=2)
	Stan	School Support Specialist (specialist)
	Sandy	School Support Specialist (specialist)
Alfred Elementary School		(n=4)
	Mr. Arnold	Principal
	Anita	Teacher
	Amelia	Teacher
	Adeline	Teacher
Babson Elementary School		(n=4)
	Ms. Beth	Principal
	Brenda	Teacher
	Bridget	Teacher
	Barbara	Teacher

The Charlesburg Public School District[1]

The Charlesburg Public School District, of which the Alfred and Babson Elementary Schools are a part, is a typical mid to large size urban district with roots in the manufacturing and mill technology of New England. The city has a diverse

[1] For more detailed information about the Charlesburg School District see appendix C.

population that is 56% White, 21% Black or African American, 2% Asian and 16.4% other race (Massachusetts Department of Housing and Community Development, 2004). Nearly 30% of the Hispanic population is of Puerto Rican descent. The median household income is $30,417 in the 2000 Census Community Profile as compared to the state's $50,502 as reported on the 2000 Census Massachusetts Profile (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000).

Within the past year the Charlesburg district has faced many fiscal problems attributed to the stagnation of state aid. The Charlesburg Public School District has been impacted by the state of affairs, but its funding has remained somewhat level.

There are a total of 47 schools in the Charlesburg Public School District, 32 of which are elementary schools. Per pupil expenditures have been increasing since 1993 because of changes made to the state aid formula when the state's comprehensive education legislation, the Massachusetts Education Reform Act, 1993 (MERA) was passed. The state funding formula that came out of MERA has increased state aid to urban districts like Charlesburg. Most importantly, MERA has leveled the fluctuations in funding levels from year to year by establishing a required level of school spending. Within the district more than three quarters of the students are considered low income and over 30% of the students, who attend the Charlesburg Schools, do not speak English as their first language or are considered "limited English proficient."

Because of budget issues, there has been a slight decline in the number of teachers working in Charlesburg schools. At the same time, there has been a slight increase in student enrollment. Salaries of teachers are slightly below the state average (Table 6.2). Teacher salaries are a big issue in the district because there have been no raises for more

than three years due to the city not funding union contracts. As a result, district and school level staff report low morale and frustration.

Table 6.2: Charlesburg Public School District Teacher Salaries and Counts as Compared with the State, 1999 and 2003

	District		State	
	1999	2003	1999	2003
Salary Totals	$92,892,766	$102,506,941	$3,081,654,861	$3,603,600,648
Average Salary	$43,622	$50,801	$45,149	$51,803
FTE Count	2,129.50	2,017.80	68,255.80	69,562.90

(Massachusetts Department of Education)

In many of the interviews with district and school staff, there was mention that there have been no pay raises for over three years. The average teacher salary continues to be lower than the state average and has contributed to some of the losses in teaching staff. A few of the interviewees mentioned that the practice of teachers taking jobs in surrounding school districts that are seen as less challenging places to work than Charlesburg, for more pay than Charlesburg was able to offer, has been increasing in frequency. Adding to the challenge of experienced teachers leaving the district, the student population has grown slightly since 1999, while the number of teachers has decreased.

Role of the District: The Negotiator

Two of the school support specialists were interviewed because of their dual roles as members of the district and as specialists. DOE requires all school support specialists to be veterans of both the Massachusetts public education system and the district in which they are working. Stan has been working in the Charlesburg District for 32 years. Fourteen of those years were spent as a teacher. After being a teacher, he became a

counselor, an assistant principal, and eventually he worked in a variety of capacities at the district level. He is well liked by all who I spoke with in the district and schools and is designated by the superintendent as the person in charge of underperforming schools. Sandy has been in public education for over 32 years and in the Charlesburg district for 27 years. She has been a teacher, grant administrator, and central office administrator. She is a detail oriented and focused administrator. Both Stan and Sandy as school support specialists felt the importance of their work and in many examples were able to enlist the help and support of others in the district office (e.g., curriculum coordinators and content specialists) to work with the underperforming schools.

The school support specialists are the connection to the underperforming schools, the district, and the DOE. They are in the middle of it all. As advocates for the underperforming schools within the district, the specialists provide a strong and direct connection between the underperforming school and the district, as well as the district and the state. Both describe efforts they have made to make people in the district comfortable with the idea of working with the schools and the state. Prior to new school accountability policy, the schools, district, and DOE had essentially been working independently of one another, and the specialists create a bridge of communication to the DOE and support and communication to the schools. Having the connection is important to the DOE because it lessens miscommunication between the DOE and the underperforming school, it increases feedback from the targets of new school accountability policy, and it creates a place for all parties to develop a theory of action around the policy. For the schools, it is critical because they are not in the habit of contacting the state when troubles arise. Rather, they turn to the district. Now that there

is someone at the district level to work with them, they are more likely to get an appropriate and timely response and support.

The specialists must juggle the counseling and supportive role with the accountability role at the district level. The "human piece" (Sandy, Charlesburg District) is an important element to the process. Principals feel threatened by the process. In fact, Sandy said, "I really worry sometimes if they'll have a heart attack over this thing." And Stan refers to the "art" of balancing support and accountability when relating to those in the schools. Embedded in their understanding of their role is the idea of building a relationship with the school. Having the "right people," who understand when they need to support or to hold a school principal accountable is identified as a critical part of their jobs. Juggling of these roles is an obvious place where the specialists are able to negotiate the implementation of new school accountability policy within the school.

The school support specialists believe there are two major components of public education that contribute to the switch from a deterrent to an enabling understanding of new school accountability policy. First, the beginning of intervention by the DOE captures the attention of the school principal and teachers in a way the district could not. The DOE is considered an outsider removed from the politics of the district and the school. Consequently, those in the school feel more obliged to listen to the state about the issues within the school. Second, the professional integrity of educators means that "people really want to be seen as good educators" (Stan, Charlesburg District). The inherent desire for educators as professionals concerned with and "very much invested in how they are seen academically" (Stan, Charlesburg District) makes an outsider's critique of the school more valid than if a district level person did it. The specialists concede that

the principal and teachers in the underperforming school are upset and angry initially, but eventually, their professionalism as educators pushes them into mobilizing and taking on the challenges within an underperforming school.

The specialists find that principals and teachers have one of two responses toward new school accountability and early intervention. Either they move forward and start making changes, or they are paralyzed. The specialists feel it is their job to encourage the principals and teachers to view the state's outside assessment as an opportunity to make changes, which professionally they already knew needed to happen. The district specialists generally believe that the power to improve exists within the underperforming school (after some staffing changes). It is simply a matter of providing focus and tapping into the educators' professional work ethic.

More than any other participants, the school support specialists repeatedly spoke of the change occurring in how the different levels of the public education system relate with one another because of new school accountability policy. They see change in their relationship with the DOE and in their relationship with the school because of school accountability policy. They know they are acting differently. Before they felt that the DOE was "underutilized," and now they realize the DOE staff are "not ogres" (Sandy, Charlesburg District) but simply people who are trying to help them. They also have an idea that the schools may have felt the same way about the district level administrators.

The DOE and the school participants view the district as the entity responsible for improving the delivery of education; however, the district school support specialists were not as explicit about taking on the responsibility. Sandy explains, "…it's not always entirely clear what the DOE does, what the district does, and what the school does [under

new school accountability policy." According to them the DOE "works" with the district and the school support specialists to "define what each… is supposed to be doing" (Sandy, Charlesburg District). Neither specialist explicitly stated that the district is responsible for school improvement. What they do know is that they are individually responsible for the improvement of the state determined underperforming schools and maybe that is enough of an understanding.

District specialists tend to see accountability in terms of everyone (including the DOE) being held accountable. Their perception is a testimony to the degree to which DOE has developed a cooperative working relationship with the district. Stan talked about the DOE administrators realizing that they would be held accountable for how well they interacted with the districts in need or with schools in need. The state's district accountability system compounds the urgency of improving schools because it holds districts accountable for how well the schools are doing. Consequently, the school support specialists believe that building a stronger relationship with the schools and improving educational outcomes will keep the district out of trouble with the state. The threat of district accountability is at least part of the incentive for the district to engage with and develop a new kind of working relationship with the schools.

As a school support specialist, Sandy describes the feeling of being in the middle of trying to improve schools, work in the district, and work with the DOE as, "[feeling] like you're trying to keep all the balls in the air, and…am I getting the work done that I need to do?" Bearing the responsibility for improving schools and keeping the district out of trouble with the state is a lot of pressure for the school support specialists. Fortunately, as veterans of the district they have a wide network of contacts and support

within the district and a new connection to members of the DOE who work with them for the common goal of improving public education in the Charlesburg District.

The district's school support specialists are purposely placed in the middle of new school accountability policy implementation. They have the ability to negotiate change at the state level as well as at the local level. Trained by the DOE and largely hired for their professional judgment, the school support specialists are the negotiators during early intervention. They are constantly making sense of the policy as it relates to the Charlesburg District and making it accessible to the underperforming school principals and teachers. In instances when they cannot make sense of the policy, the specialists turn to the DOE to discuss their challenges and negotiate a workable solution. It is a give and take.

Rather than allowing district administrators to make decisions about how well or not so well the policy fits in their district, the DOE has built an ally and "fixer" into the implementation process. The school support specialists must consistently follow the implementation of new school accountability policy strategies within each underperforming schools and make adjustments to implementation (Stan calls this an "art") so that it makes sense for the school and for the intent of the policy. Negotiation of implementation is a natural part of the specialists' role and is evident in their district's working relationships with the DOE and the underperforming schools. The district's role in new school accountability policy implementation and early intervention is explored further in chapter 8. Now the targets of the policy, the underperforming schools are examined.

The Underperforming Schools

The two elementary schools in the study are elementary schools from the Charlesburg School District. Alfred Elementary School was declared underperforming in the 2002-2003 academic year (2003 underperforming school review cycle) and Babson Elementary School was declared underperforming in the following 2003-2004 academic year (2004 underperforming school review cycle). In both instances the principal, who was in charge of the school when it was declared underperforming, was subsequently removed from the school.

The DOE does not track the exact number of principals removed in the midst of early intervention, but there is general agreement that designation of a school as underperforming is usually followed by a change in leadership, especially in the Charlesburg District. The removal of the principal is typically the action a superintendent takes once a school is declared underperforming. In the Charlesburg District, in all but one of the schools declared underperforming by the state, a new principal was placed at the helm of the school by the summer following the school year in which a school was declared underperforming. Generally, principals are replaced before the school goes into the state mandated school improvement planning process (PIM training), which is conducted over the summer.

With the exception of the number of English Language Learners (ELL), the two elementary schools have fairly similar student bodies. The Babson School has a larger student population (n=321) than the Alfred School (n=280). Also, the student populations are similar in terms of percentages of student who are from low-income

backgrounds and who require special education. Babson Elementary, however, serves a much higher number of "First Language Not English" and "Limited English Proficient" students. The racial composition of the student body between the two schools is similar (Table 6.3). The student to teacher ratio is lower in Babson Elementary, and may be attributed to the larger population of ELL students (Table 6.4). The Charlesburg District has a policy regarding student teacher ratios and by most reports they have met the demands of the policy.

Table 6.3: Percentage of Selected Student Populations (2003-2004)

	% of Alfred Elementary	% of Babson Elementary	% of Charlesburg School District	% of Massachusetts
First Language not English	2.3	31.3	17	13.7
Limited English Proficient	0.4	26.4	11.6	5
Low-income	84.3	84.9	77.1	27.2
Special Education	13.0	12.9	20.0	15.6

(Massachusetts Department of Education, 2004)

Table 6.4: Distribution Pupils by Race October 1, 2004

	% Native American	% Asian	% African American	% Hispanic	% White
Charlesburg District	0.2%	2.5%	27.9%	49.9%	19.5%
Alfred Elementary	0.0%	2.1%	21.8%	58.2%	17.9%
Babson Elementary	0.3%	3.4%	19.3%	62.0%	15.0%

(Massachusetts Department of Education, 2004)

Table 6.5: Teacher Data (2003-2004)

	Alfred Elementary	Babson Elementary	Charlesburg District	Massachusetts
Total # of Teachers	20	34	2,302	72,062
% of Teachers Licensed in Teaching Assignment	100	91.2	88.9	93.9
% of Core Academic Teachers Identified as Highly Qualified	100	90.3	86.8	93.9
Student/Teacher Ratio	13.1 to 1	10.9 to 1	11.4 to 1	13.6 to 1

(Massachusetts Department of Education, 2004)

Alfred Elementary School[2]

Like many of the school buildings in the district, Alfred Elementary was built during the early 1900's. It is embedded in a neighborhood, surrounded by homes on all sides. There are 280 students attending the school in grades K-5. There are a total of 20 teachers working in the building. Alfred Elementary School is an older building that is well-maintained in the inside, but looks in need of repair from the outside. It is a small school on a single floor with an open courtyard in the center. There is practically no technology in the school, and teachers describe the supplies of educational materials as limited at best.

The principal of the Alfred Elementary is Mr. Arnold. He came to Alfred Elementary in the summer after the school was declared underperforming by the DOE (during the 2003 underperforming school review cycle). Mr. Arnold has been in the district for over ten years as a teacher and a counselor. He was an assistant principal for

[2] Early intervention had a different timeline during the year Alfred Elementary was declared underperforming. Alfred Elementary was declared underperforming during the 2003 review cycle. The PIM was held in the summer following the School Panel Review (as it still is), and the Fact Finding Review was conducted the following fall (rather than in the spring prior to the PIM training as it is now). Therefore, Mr. Arnold participated in the PIM and the Fact Finding Review. In fact, he was hired a few days prior to attending the state PIM training.

one year and then became a principal, for the first time, at Alfred Elementary School. He is in his early thirties and extremely energetic, focused, and clearly involved with all of the teachers. During visits to the school, it became clear that there is a strong, respectful, working relationship with many of the teachers in the building. Interviews with teachers in the school support this assertion. Even though the school has recently made its annual yearly progress (AYP) goals, it is required to be monitored for two years after being declared underperforming by the state. Because the school has achieved AYP, those in the school have a sense of success, though Mr. Arnold and some of the teachers feel that there is still much to do and plenty of improvement to be made. The attitude that prevailed in the school is one of focus, determination, and collegiality.

The three teachers interviewed from the school were indirectly and directly connected to the underperforming school early intervention by the state. Anita is a teacher in her mid forties and has taught in the school for three years. She has worked as a drug counselor in the city of Charlesburg and been involved in education for ten years. She is an active member of the faculty and advocate within the school, though because of family issues did not participate in the school improvement planning process that took place after school hours and over the summer. Amelia is a teacher in her early thirties and has worked as a teacher in the school and Charlesburg district for five years. Though more reserved, she did participate on the school improvement planning team when the district ran the process the year prior to her school being declared underperforming. After the state came in, she handed over the duties to other teachers in the building, but communicated with them regularly. Adeline is in her early fifties and has taught in the school and district for seven years, after switching to teaching in mid career. She

conveys a positive attitude and is an active participant in the school having participated on the PIM team during the year of their intervention (last year). Collectively the teachers provide insight to many aspects of new school accountability policy during early intervention.

When speaking to the new principal and the teachers, they each point to the same problems in the school prior to state intervention: the old principal was ineffective and caused many problems amongst the teaching faculty. The teachers feel the district administrators were aware of the issues and did nothing to help the situation. Mr. Arnold believes, "[The teachers] deliberately were fighting against the past administrator, and I think they stopped teaching." The teachers describe the former principal as someone who played favorites, who was mercurial in nature, and who really just wanted to shut her door and not be bothered with the running of the school. One teacher described the dissension between the faculty and the principal and how the teachers together contemplated getting the superintendent's attention.

> …I remember there being times where… the teachers said, 'Well what if we just all sit out in front of the building today and just refuse to come in?' You know? What kind of message would that send to the superintendent… that we have a very ineffective leader in our building? And, of course we're all professionals here, and we wouldn't do that. But... what does it need to take? There were numerous complaints and so forth. So, I don't know how [the district administrators] were unaware. (Amelia, teacher, Alfred Elementary)

Another spoke of the challenge of engaging the district

> We were very glad to see [the DOE] come in because nothing was getting done district wide. No matter, how many grievances were filed, how many reports were filed, nothing was getting done at the district level. We kept on being promised but nothing was getting done. (Adeline, teacher, Alfred Elementary)

Like Adeline, each of the teachers mentioned that many complaints had been filed at the district office, but they were met with no district response until the state decided to visit the school. The new principal, Mr. Arnold, was a part of the district response.

After being declared underperforming in the spring of 2003, the school lost nine teachers or 45% of the teachers in the building, and the principal was removed and placed into a central office position. It is not clear what this says about district staff. The impression given from the specialists is that sometimes a principal is placed into a school that he or she may be ill-equipped to manage. The problem is characterized as a bad fit between the needs of the school and the skills of the principal, rather than as a bad principal. The district staff seem to be aware that there are mismatches between schools and principals, but because there are so few qualified principals, they do not have a choice in the matter. Candidates for principal are often weak or inexperienced because there is a shortage of qualified elementary school principals (National Association of Elementary School Principals, 2005), and district staff identified this is a challenge. Additionally, they agreed that there is an unwillingness at the district superintendent level to fire principals who do not fit into difficult leadership positions.

With a new administrator and nearly half the staff new to the school, things at Alfred Elementary dramatically changed between the time of the School Panel and Fact Finding Reviews. Teachers in the school felt the change immediately. On the whole the teaching faculty understood that prior to intervention the school was an underperforming school. Adeline explains,

> … before we were identified as underperforming, in my opinion, and talking to other staff members that were here at the time, we all felt that we were an underperforming school. We were a school

> that lacked direction… and… congeniality, there just wasn't any. We worked. We left. (Adeline, teacher, Alfred Elementary)

The professional judgment of the teachers in the school is that it was underperforming long before the state visit. In fact, many of the teachers discussed a downward spiral for over five years in which the district provided no help. Because of the situation at the school the teachers felt that any kind of help, even the severity of a state visit had to make things better.

The district staff reported that they were aware the test scores at Alfred Elementary were not good. However, the district's own capacity limitations made it difficult for them to address the issues at the school. Sandy describes a possible scenario:

> [It] could be that the current principal or the past principal cut off all communications with the people at central office that could help him or her for whatever reason; it could be that [the principals are] managers – in other words, they keep the building quiet, there's no parents coming down here [to the district office] and complaining but they don't let anybody in. Nobody really has a sense of what's going on [in the school]… (Sandy, Charlesburg District)

There is an expectation that the school principal will reach out to the district, and that the district, with its own limitations of capacity, can easily ignore a school that is not engaged with the district because there are so many other things that must be done. The onus of responsibility for school improvement at the local level, therefore, is upon the principal. The district tended not to interfere as long as there were no parents complaining.

After the school was identified as underperforming, Mr. Arnold felt there were tremendous supports from the district. It is clear the district involvement in and connection with the school has made a huge difference in the school. Since being declared underperforming, Alfred Elementary has been a success story as it has had

modest gains in student test scores in the first year of being monitored, and the teachers and principal alike are pleased with the improvement, though each admits there is a long road ahead. A positive attitude permeated the building and the interviews.

Babson Elementary School

Babson Elementary is an older school built in the early 1900's. Though it is old, the inside has interesting architecture with two grand staircases that come down and spill out into the front foyer. There are classrooms on three floors, the basement, first and second floors. The woodwork in the building is well maintained, and the classrooms I visited looked like elementary school classrooms in any school. The kindergarten through fifth grade school serves 320 students and has 34 teachers. In the school, the new principal and three teachers were interviewed about their perceptions of new school accountability policy and the working relationship between the state and their school.

The principal of the Babson Elementary is Ms. Beth. Ms Beth is in her mid fifties and was transferred to the Babson Elementary from another school at which she was the principal for ten years. She was born and raised in the city and in her own words, "bought a plot in the cemetery" so she'll "likely die here." She has worked for the district for over thirty years and is very much engaged in the politics of the district. She said she was not surprised when she heard Babson Elementary was going to be declared underperforming, because the "administrators meet regularly, and they know what's going on in the district." She describes feeling "ashamed" of being in charge of an underperforming school and feels she had no choice but to move to this school if she wanted to still be a principal in Charlesburg. In our conversation it was clear that she still

had a foot in her old school. In fact, she noted that she "will be very disappointed if my name is not on the [old school's] report card."

The three teachers interviewed are members of the school's PIM team and are therefore more intimately familiar with early intervention and new school accountability policy. Brenda is in her early thirties, has been working at Babson Elementary for six years and has been working in the Charlesburg school district for 7 years. She has taught in the classroom for over a decade and has an allegiance to the school, despite the fact that most of her former colleagues have left the school. Brenda is highly involved in the school and the school improvement planning process and has been since the year prior to its being declared underperforming when the district implemented a school improvement planning process. Bridget is in her late forties and has also been involved in the school improvement planning process with Brenda. She has taught at Babson Elementary and in the district for a total of 6 years. Prior to coming to Charlesburg, she taught for over ten years in private schools in the United States and internationally. Bridget is engaged in the planning process and has seen a positive change in morale amongst the staff since Ms. Beth has arrived as the principal of the school. Barbara is in her mid fifties and is a professional development teacher at Babson Elementary. She came to the school with Ms. Beth. She is a member of the PIM team and has long been Ms. Beth's colleague. She has been working in the Charlesburg Public Schools for 33 years in a number of capacities. Barbara has served as a classroom teacher and a Title I teacher in reading and math. She works closely with Ms. Beth and brings a friendly sense of humor to the planning process.

When the school was declared underperforming approximately 80% of the staff transferred out of Babson Elementary. Over the summer Ms. Beth had to hire nearly an entire school of new teachers, adding to the challenges of being put in charge of overseeing an underperforming school. While high staff turnover does occur once a school is declared underperforming, school and district people interviewed indicated that by all accounts the turnover at Babson Elementary was extraordinarily high.

Being a veteran and replacement principal at Babson Elementary brings about many challenges for a new principal in the underperforming elementary school. First, there is a degree of personal reconciliation about why you, as a principal, are put in the school. As a professional, the principal wants to do the best she can, however personally she feels some shame in being associated with an underperforming school. For Ms. Beth it is especially true. She felt as though she had no choice but to move from the high performing school she was principal of to Babson, because the superintendent required her to change. There is a sense that Ms. Beth knows she is a good principal, but facing the hard work to improve an underperforming school, on a personal level, is overwhelming.

Ms Beth's feelings about not being supported by the state or by the district may be attributed to the disruption in the working relationship over early intervention that occurs when a principal is replaced. In fact, Ms. Beth was uncertain about who the DOE liaison assigned to Babson Elementary even was. She was generally aware of a DOE person that would check in on the PIM team, but was not sure what role that person would or would not play in the future. At first she indicated that the district staff were just as absent from the school. Because she was moved to the school under less than

ideal circumstances, she felt the district staff and superintendent owed her support. Her expectations of the level of support are high, and the district staff simply were not living up to them. Eventually, she did mention that the two school support specialists were involved in their improvement planning process and that they had been helpful to the school.

Early intervention is designed to be supportive to the school prior to and during the two review visits. Ms. Beth came to the school after these visits and thus did not feel supported or connected to anyone at the DOE. Being new to the school and to the process, she was forced to learn about the school and what it means to be underperforming in a very short period of time. The demanding learning curve and anxiety about taking charge of a new school contribute to the feelings of not being supported, and indeed much of the DOE's relationship building strategies are missed by a new principal. It can be very isolating for the new principal.

Ms Beth was interviewed a few weeks prior to presenting Babson Elementary's school improvement plan to the state Board of Education (BOE). Upon approval by the BOE, a new level of support is laid out for the school with the specialist and the DOE liaison meeting regularly with the underperforming school principal. The shift from being declared underperforming to being monitored by the state brings about a new round of support and a new opportunity for a positive working relationship between the school and the DOE and district. Indeed, in correspondence with Ms. Beth after the school's plan was approved by the BOE, she wrote,

> My DOE [liaison] is great and very accommodating of her time to me and the school. I have received a great deal of help from the district level support specialists to date, and all school personnel have called me in the last few months to offer any assistance. I

> have not asked for a great deal of help, only because of who and what I'm all about. But, it is nice to know they really do care about my students and staff. (Ms. Beth, principal, Babson Elementary)

The comment is much more similar to the perspective of Mr. Arnold, who felt extremely supported by the district. His school is further along on the early intervention process, and therefore he was receiving more support. At the time of Ms. Beth's interview she had not yet presented her improvement plan before the Board of Education.

At Babson Elementary the School Panel Review and Fact Finding Review reports along with principal and staff interviews point to a history of inadequate principal leadership and district neglect. The last principal being ill-equipped for the school, and the inconsistent quality of the teaching staff led to Babson Elementary being declared underperforming. As each of the teachers said,

> The administration wasn't helping. The district wasn't helping. The kids were doing poor. The parents weren't here. The teachers were working hard. Some teachers weren't. It was just a mess. It was a mess. It really was…I've been here six years and [the school] just kind of spiraled downward. (Brenda, teacher, Babson Elementary)

> I haven't seen much of anything. I thought…the past few years things had gotten worse than better within the school. And what was going on in the school? And, I don't' mean to put anybody down, but what I saw and what was going on in the classrooms. I thought things had deteriorated. (Bridget, teacher, Babson Elementary)

> There were kids running around doing nothing. There were classrooms we went into where there was no learning going on…[T]here was nothing going on that looked like learning. (Barbara, teacher, Babson Elementary)

Throughout the discussions with the principal and the teachers about Babson's underperforming status, there was a wavering between professional opinion and personal

shame. Interestingly, each participant could identify the reasons that Babson Elementary was declared underperforming, and none of the teachers felt that the declaration of underperformance was a surprise. The school's test scores were low, and the teachers knew they would be reviewed by the state. Teachers said they knew about the problems that were cited in the reports long before the state came into the school. Teachers described a ripple effect within the school. Teaching was inconsistent in classrooms because the principals over the years were not holding teachers accountable, and principals were not being held accountable by the superintendent and district staff. According to one teacher, "…[the district] was like, 'Let's forget you exist'" (Bridget, teacher, Babson Elementary).

There had been problems in the school over a period of over six years, but teachers felt helpless to change things within the school. Bridget said,

> It's not anybody's fault, but my general feeling is that everybody looks at us, the teachers, but they don't look at all of the things. And, they don't want to hear these things. You do, you know, I think people do the best they can with what they've got…" (Bridget, teacher, Babson Elementary)

Teachers did the best they could, but remained isolated. Still, there is a palpable sentiment of shame or maybe embarrassment in being associated with a state designated underperforming school. Over the period of an interview the principal and the teachers would oscillate between giving their professional opinion about the problems in the school, which were in accord with the findings in the state reports, and the frustration and embarrassment about what was written in the school's Panel Review and Fact Finding Review reports. Feelings amongst the staff about the DOE intervention can be described best as complicated.

When one teacher was asked about her feeling about new school accountability policy, she stated, "Are you talking about the teachers being accountable for everything" (Bridget, teacher, Babson Elementary)? Clearly, there is a degree of ownership embedded within the professional tenets of the teachers, which pre-dates new school accountability policy, but the understanding of the policy even as a school staff is experiencing early intervention continues to be tainted by a less than desirable and less than empowering perception of the policy.

The school staff's expectations of support from the district were very high and, according to those in the school, they were unmet. In the year prior to being declared underperforming, Babson Elementary along with all of the other district schools was required by the district to participate in a school improvement planning process. However, the district staff were unable to provide the level of support that many of the schools needed. As Brenda explained,

> We didn't have any help. We made phone calls. District people didn't show up. …[T]hey had no idea. Supposedly they looked at the [school improvement plan], and they sent it back and said we had to make some changes. We did, but we didn't have help. Nobody really knew what they were doing including ourselves. It was a work in progress, but the district people really didn't know, ...so we kind of got the run around. (Brenda, teacher, Babson Elementary)

> Before Ms. Beth came, [the district administrators] were not seen, not heard. They didn't show up. If we called for help, they didn't come. I mean, I've got to tell you. There are two stories. One story was, 'Yes, I called them to come, and they never showed up.' Another [district's side of the] story was, 'Well, they were rude to me when I got to the door, so I turned away, turned and walked away.' (Brenda, teacher, Babson Elementary)

Bridget also reported frustration with the lack of district support.

> You know, I just think the district; they come in and throw things at us. And, you know, we're supposed to do these things, but nobody backs us up. Nobody comes in to retrain or model or do anything. (Bridget, teacher, Babson Elementary)

The working relationship between the state and the underperforming school had less "baggage" because there are fewer expectations for the relationship. The district, however, must confront and overcome a prevalent feeling of neglect and anger about the neglect amongst the staff within the underperforming school.

The Local Context

There are differences between the two schools in the way each of the principals and teachers perceive the beginning of intervention. Not surprisingly, the unique characteristics within any given school may account for differences in how a school responds to early intervention. O'Day (2004) found that "…this unevenness may be directly tied to the internal conditions in the schools that make them more or less able to use information generated by the accountability system" (p. 25). The cohesiveness among the staff, the internal trust among teachers, and the trust they have in the principal each contribute to the differences (Bryk & Schneider, 2002).

Overall the teachers and principal at Alfred Elementary tended to be more positive than the teachers and principal at Babson Elementary. The most obvious reason for the difference is that Alfred Elementary had been declared underperforming in the 2003 underperforming school review cycle and had since had a round of testing in which the school had shown enough improvement to move off the federal NCLB list, but still monitored by the DOE. Having felt a small success and improvement, teachers and the principal may see the beginning of intervention in a much different light than those

teachers and the principal at Alfred Elementary who were still in the "thick of it" having yet to complete their school improvement planning. The Alfred Elementary principal and teachers still had to work long hours to conduct the data driven analysis required by PIM, as well as doing their jobs at the school. Because PIM is the point where the school team is expected to take responsibility for school improvement, it can be a difficult transition for team members.

Another possible cause in the difference is the teaching staff in each of the schools. At Babson Elementary nearly all of the staff left after the school was declared underperforming, while at Alfred Elementary a little less than half of the staff left (still quite a few, but not as dramatic). It may be evidence of difference in the levels of trust and sense of collaboration and cohesion among the teachers in the school, with both having a high teacher turnover, but Babson Elementary certainly having a much higher loss. At Babson Elementary, the norms of the school environment were lost as the veteran teachers became a minority group, while at Alfred Elementary, veteran teachers were still the majority group.

Further, the School Panel Review and Fact Finding Review reports were different and perceived differently by the staff between the two schools. At Alfred Elementary the report was more focused on the inadequacy of the principal and instructional leadership and less focused on problems in the classroom, though there were a few. Teachers at Alfred truly felt that there was not a problem with them, but that it was the administrator, and they strongly felt that state reports backed them up. Alfred teachers described a cohesive group of educators who knew they were good teachers.

In contrast, Babson Elementary state reports were equally damning toward the principal and the teachers in the classroom. Babson teachers described an environment in the school where everyone just did their own thing. They expressed awareness that there were teachers in the school who were not doing their job, but they felt helpless to make any changes. The new principal and the teachers clearly stated that the principal was not holding teachers accountable and the environment in the school was chaotic on a daily basis. Teachers stated that they knew they were good teachers, but still felt like the reports singled them out as bad teachers and took things out of context. The anger and devastation after reading the reports and especially the Fact Finding Review report was palpable at Babson Elementary.

New principals placed at each school changed the context in the school. Having been placed in the school after it was declared underperforming and just prior to the PIM training, principals were forced to enter into a state mandated school improvement planning process at the helm of an underperforming school of which they knew very little. In both cases the new principals started at the school less than a week prior to having to go to PIM. Not knowing the teaching staff can make the PIM extremely difficult for the new principal for the purposes of planning. In both instances they had to hire many new teachers and were unable to do that until the end of the summer. So, they were forced to lead a team to plan for the future of a school without knowing the existing teaching staff and not knowing the qualifications of the staff he or she would be hiring.

Both principals stated that there were not many people interested in being the principal of their schools, nor were many people interested in teaching at their schools. Once a school is declared underperforming and the principal is removed, there are very

few candidates from within the district who want to transfer to a school in which the state is intervening. As a matter of fact, Mr. Arnold felt fortunate that he was able to get a principal job so quickly because none of the current principals in the district were interested in the job. He was able to apply and get the job without any prior experience as a principal. In the case of Babson Elementary, Ms. Beth was the principal of a high achieving school and was asked by the superintendent to take over as principal of Babson Elementary. Ms. Beth did not want to leave her old school and especially did not want to have to do the work of building a school from the "ground up." However, she felt that her choices were limited and that professionally she had to do her duty.

As much as an underperforming school is not the most desirable place for a principal, it is even less desirable for teachers. Both principals discussed the difficulty in finding teachers to fill the vacant positions. Mr. Arnold received help finding teachers for the vacancies from the school support specialist. Ms. Beth, after having no one apply for the vacancies and having over 80% of the teaching positions to fill, appealed for help from the superintendent. She said that she was finally able to hire outside the district and found teachers in the final weeks of summer.

Keeping up with the demands of being declared underperforming, providing instructional leadership in the classrooms, training a new teaching staff, and securing the resources needed in the school proved to be extremely demanding for each principal. Being new to the school only made things more challenging, though each principal did feel that entering the school buildings on the heels of an inadequate leader set the bar low. Just talking with the teachers and getting district resources were improvements in the school.

Principals and teachers universally agreed that the schools were indeed underperforming before the state intervention. They also agreed that being declared underperforming by the state created many changes in their schools that would not have occurred without state intervention. At least in the short term, the principals and teachers believed these changes would lead to school improvement.

Conclusion

O'Day (2004) asserts that schools respond unevenly to school accountability intervention strategies because they are starting from very different places. The evidence from the local level participant surveys and observations supports O'Day's (2004) assertion in the cases of Alfred and Babson Elementary Schools. However, O'Day's point also implies that a state externally imposed accountability system will not impact the underperforming school because it does not mobilize the professionally driven internal accountability system within the school. The findings from Alfred Elementary and Babson Elementary do not sufficiently support this argument.

Rather, the teachers from the underperforming schools claimed that the changes that occurred in the schools after they were intervened in by the state would not have happened if the schools had not been declared underperforming. The attention of the DOE upon the schools caused rapid changes in the leadership and staffs of each school. Prior to the beginning of intervention teachers identified problems within the school but felt helpless to change them. In fact, some teachers went over the head of their principal and complained to the district. They found the district to be unresponsive until the state declared their school underperforming.

In Alfred Elementary and in Babson Elementary, teachers in the schools clearly articulated the feeling that the district had been neglecting their schools for five years or longer. The beginning of state intervention changed the pattern of chronic neglect between the district and the underperforming schools, when nothing else, even their complaints, seemed to alter the relationship. As one specialist indicated, if no parents were complaining, then the district did not take the time to look into a school. Even teacher complaints did not alter the pattern.

The district's role in neglecting the underperforming schools prior to state intervention is an interesting one. The district staff experience their own limitations of capacity. If, as Ms. Beth continually pointed out, everyone in the district knows where the bad schools are and the ineffective administrators are, why did the district not intervene in the schools? The reason lies in a traditional manifestation of bureaucracy in the context of constrained resources. The district administrators worked with the school principals and educators who were contacting the district staff and may have had smaller problems to fix. The district administrators probably intended to help fix the small problems and eventually get to the big problems. Another possible explanation is Maynard Moody and Musheno's (2004) assertion that clients must be deemed worthy of services and respect the expertise of those delivering the services. The environment in both schools described communication as cut-off from the district and isolated. The district as deliverers of expertise were not always appropriately received by those in the school, and therefore moved on to more "worthy" clients or schools.

In both schools, teachers reported that prior to intervention there was no contact or help coming from the district and relations were characterized as hostile or negative

between the schools and the district. As Maynard Moody and Musheno (2004) state, "When [clients] do not comply…workers disengage and move on to other cases and other situations" (p. 138). Limitations in capacity in such instances are used to the advantage of the district, because there are always other schools to help in an urban district. In such a structure, ignoring big problems is possible because there are always other issues to address. When there is more work than any single district administrator is capable of accomplishing, it is easier to work with school principals and educators who are receptive to working with the district. The beginning of intervention during new school accountability policy implementation upsets the traditional approach, by prioritizing the worst of the worse as targets of intervention. Early state intervention therefore, shines light and attention of the district upon the previously neglected underperforming schools. It serves to focus and prioritize resources at the district level by clearly articulating the areas of need.

The partnership between the DOE and the district serves several purposes. First, it creates a working relationship between the two that encourages mutual respect and reciprocity. These feelings are then conveyed by the district to the school and help build a positive relationship between the DOE and the underperforming school at the beginning of intervention. Second, by giving resources in the form of specialists to the district, DOE has enlisted a partner and developed capacity at the district level to help the state identified underperforming schools as well as the schools that are underperforming according to federal NCLB designation, but in which the state has not intervened. Last, the DOE is able to communicate the expectations of the districts roles and responsibilities in multiple ways. By modeling a process that looks at the worst schools, the DOE

encourages the district to do the same. Through regular training and meetings, the DOE and the district have formed a true partnership in which they are able to negotiate the implementation of new school accountability policy.

Evidence of the impact of the partnership between the district and the DOE can be found in the changes in staffing patterns after a school is declared underperforming during the beginning of intervention. In the Charlesburg District all but one of the principals was removed shortly before or after their school was declared underperforming. Additionally, high percentages of staff leave the school building. The district imposes much more severe interventions than the state, which look more like strong interventions such as reconstitution. The self imposed reconstitution of the district's underperforming schools means the district is taking on the responsibility of strong accountability interventions, and that the DOE may have delegated this responsibility to the district.

CHAPTER VII

THE WORKING RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND THE UNDERPERFORMING SCHOOL

The state and local level perspectives are combined to determine the type of working relationship that exists between the DOE and the underperforming schools. There are several points during the early intervention process that capture the evolution of the working relationship between the two. Those segments include the past relationship, the performance and strategic criteria captured in the School Panel Review, the diagnostic intervention or Fact Finding Review, and the corrective intervention or Performance Improvement Mapping (PIM).

When examining the state and local perspectives on their working relationship during early intervention, there is a noteworthy difference in their viewpoints. The state level perspective takes a longer-term view upon the working relationship and early intervention than the local level. This is likely because the DOE staff and contractors have been implementing new school accountability policy for a number of years, but the educators in the underperforming schools most likely experience the beginning of intervention once. Throughout the state level participants' perspectives of the working relationship is a strong sense that the process is being continually refined or negotiated, and rather than having one shot at the process like an underperforming school, they have many opportunities to change the process of intervention.

On the other hand, the local level experiences of principals and teachers during an underperforming school review cycle are much more specific because unlike those at the state level, they only experience early intervention once (unless they change schools). Consequently, their experiences and insights are not as reflective or as general as one finds among the state level administrators and contractors who participate in early intervention on an annual basis. The perspective of those in the schools is therefore much more of a once in a lifetime experience and less concentrated upon continuous improvement of the early intervention process. This makes the experience of principals and teachers in underperforming schools a testing ground to examine whether the DOE goals of support and messages of enabling the school to improve are effective and understood by the principals and teachers in the underperforming schools, who are expected to accomplish these goals.

At the state level the DOE and ABC Consulting aim to develop a positive working relationship with the underperforming school in order to support improvement. Daphne explains the nurturing approach the DOE takes when implementing new school accountability policy.

> [W]e have…this medical analogy where we say, 'if we look at your student performance results over time, you are a patient being brought to the emergency room because you are bleeding profusely [underperforming]. When you are in the emergency room, the emergency room physician is first going to stop the bleeding.' That's what the Panel Review is. 'We're coming in.' We're going to say, 'We've got to stop this bleeding. This school is underperforming.' They need help. So, we're going to apply that tourniquet, if you will, that label of underperforming. 'And, then once we've stopped the bleeding, we're going to take you to the specialist who is going to really look you over and figure what in the world caused this.' That's the Fact Finding Review. 'Where we are going to spend time in your classrooms, we're going to look at teaching and learning close up and we're going to tell you what

> we think is working and what isn't working, and we're going to tell you what we think is working and what isn't working, and we're going to help you figure out why that is. And, [Performance Improvement Mapping training, a.k.a.] PIM is going to help you do that.' That's our medicine we have. (Daphne, DOE)

Daphne describes a process that takes the school through several steps of identification of underperformance, diagnosis of the problems within the school and providing the tools or "medicine" to the school through the PIM training process. Differences in the reaction of those in the school are dependent upon how well they understand how to use the "medicine" and how well they respond to the "medicine."

Developing a working relationship between the school and the DOE is evident and is reinforced throughout the state level discussion about the early intervention process. An example of this can be found with the contractor, ABC Consulting. As an organizational method, ABC Consultants are trained to place top priority on relationship building because the DOE's strategy requires this, and because of their experience working with schools in Massachusetts and in other parts of the country. The ABC Consultants discussed the importance of their relationship with the school often in the interviews.

> …[W]e've learned from… having been in so, so, many schools and having to provide feedback that's not always positive, and it is sometimes critical that the way for that feedback to be heard and …to be useful is to have developed… a trusting relationship between the schools and us. …I know certainly it is for us. It is something we've learned over time. I think it's true in the work the DOE does. I think… they would say, 'Yes, we understand that you've got to persuade these principals, these superintendents whomever you're speaking with that we're really there to help their work.' (Christie, ABC Consulting)

> …I think that when you… talk about the obstacles to acceptance of this process that could be raised by a district or by a school, in a sense that it could become a hostile process and has been very adversarial. A lot of the people that have the training pay attention

> to how do you go into a school and neutralize the process as much as you can and personalize it in a positive way. They try to help people understand that this is not a finger pointing exercise. (Chuck, ABC Consulting)

Christie talks about having to sell or persuade the local district superintendents and principals that it is a supportive intervention and not, as Chuck calls it, a "finger pointing exercise" or a deterrent system. As partners of the DOE the ABC Consultants advocate for a positive working relationship between the state and local levels, and thus as the face of early intervention help the DOE to develop that kind of relationship. In many ways the ABC Consultants carry the burden of commencing a positive working relationship between the state and the underperforming school.

The initial desire for a positive working relationship is not necessarily prevalent or a priority for those at the local level. Building on that commonality between the two schools, there are also some distinct difference between the experiences of participants in Alfred Elementary and Babson Elementary. First, one of the principals is new to being a principal and the other is an experienced principal, which means many things and fundamentally contributed to a difference in the expectations each principal had for the district and the state. Ms. Beth, the experienced principal, believes there should be a tremendous amount of resources and support from the district and possibly the DOE. Mr. Arnold, on the other hand, did not have such high expectations, though it is clear that he understands maintaining frequent communication between the school and the district is essential to getting the school the resources it needs. Second, the predominant attitude among the teachers was notably different between the two schools. Generally, Babson Elementary teachers' responses were either neutral or slightly negative toward the entire

process while the Alfred Elementary teachers were much more positive and accepting of early intervention.

Alfred and Babson Elementary Schools are different schools with different issues, and the unique context of the schools more than likely contributes to these differences. Another potential reason for the differences may be that they are in different points of the early intervention process. Alfred Elementary staff members were past the state's Board of Education (BOE) approval of their school improvement plan and have had positive feedback in terms of higher student test results. Babson Elementary was still in the thick of the early intervention process. They were putting the finishing touches on their school improvement plan, which by all accounts is an arduous process, and preparing to present the plan to the BOE. Additionally, much of the support that comes from the state and district really commences after the BOE has approved the school's improvement plan. For that reason, staff members from Babson Elementary may have been feeling alone in their efforts. So, while some of the difference may be due to differences between the schools, at least some of the differences may be attributed to where they are in the early intervention process. Still throughout the local level participant responses there are common threads and attitudes toward the DOE during the beginning of intervention.

The working relationship analysis includes the long term point of view of the state participants and the short (or one) time view of the local participants with regard to the beginning of intervention. Each of the points in time, past, School Panel Review, Fact Finding Review, and PIM are examined to look at the state and local level perceptions of one another during early intervention.

Past Relationship

The past working relationship between the DOE and any given underperforming school is virtually non-existent. Prior to identifying a school as underperforming, the DOE worked with the district, which in turn worked with the school. The work is characterized as compliance driven, which was typically found in state departments of education prior to new school accountability policy. When asked if they had a past relationship with the school, DOE staff said "no." Those in the schools, with a few exceptions discussed previously, agreed that the relationship between the school and the DOE, and for that matter any individual within the school and any individual within the DOE did not exist.

State Level

An interesting facet of the state level perspectives was the DOE staff's and ABC Consultants' understanding or attempted understanding of how principals and teachers in an underperforming school feel about and react to the beginning of intervention. One example of this state level understanding is described by Chuck, an ABC Consultant and Chair of the state teams, who is a retired principal. His experience lent him a special insight into the local level and the past relationship between the state and the local levels of the education system,

> I think that in the beginning when reform began there was such a crazy distrust of what was going on because people were so unaccustomed to being held accountable. Other than standard tests that were administered at a district level the belief that [privatizing education] …was supposed to happen or that that was the underlying goal of the conservative movement, I mean it was there. (Chuck, ABC Consulting)

> I think [the working relationship between the DOE and the school] is very small. The relationship, … you know…there was really very little interface. (Chuck, ABC Consulting)

Chuck's explanation reveals "distrust" towards the state because of the legislated education reform that brought about new school accountability policy. Among educators, he explains, there is a belief that the policy makers want to eliminate public education and opt for a privatized education system, which drives the distrust among those working in public education. The deterrent nature of new school accountability policy to the perceived undercurrent of privatizing public education only furthers the distrust. Without any kind of working relationship with schools, the "distrust" was not immediately addressed, and has gone unmanaged since the onset of new school accountability policy. Now, early intervention is the moment where the distrust is lessened, and it can only be changed by actions of the state and how the local level stakeholders perceive those actions.

Truly, since the passage of the comprehensive reform legislation (Massachusetts Education Reform Act, 1993) created its own waves of upheaval among schools in Massachusetts, new school accountability policy and, particularly, early intervention is the first time the state and the underperforming school have had to confront one another. DOE visits to underperforming schools bring the school staff face to face with the state and more than likely the past distrust Chuck discusses, at least initially, contributes to the "defensiveness" and fighting back by the schools that DOE and contractors encountered during the earlier years of implementation.

The ability for state level actors like Chuck to place themselves in the shoes of the educators at the local level has helped to get the working relationship between the DOE and the underperforming school off to a good start. Overall, the DOE and ABC

Consulting staff were aware of the feelings of distrust toward the legislative reforms and noted that there was much more acceptance among those in the schools since the legislation was first passed and a few years of early intervention have been put into practice. State level participants believed that local level educators were beginning to understand the reforms and accountability are not going away. In particular, as new school accountability policy implementation has been experienced by those at the local level, there is a pragmatic understanding of the beginning of intervention among educators, which has lessened the defensiveness they meet at the underperforming school's door.

Underperforming Schools

Generally speaking, the school principals and staff have no relationship or experience with staff members from the DOE prior to early intervention. Discussions about the "central office" always referred to the district. Feelings toward the district tended to be negative and toward the DOE tended to be full of low expectations.

As an example of the low expectations those in the school have for the DOE, two of the teachers, one from each of the schools described a brief encounter with the DOE prior to their interaction during early intervention. One described finding an error on the scoring of student tests from her school. She spoke with a contact person at the DOE, whose name she could not remember, and the DOE person found her to be correct. The DOE staff person changed the results immediately, and the teacher was rather impressed and surprised at how fast the change was made. Another teacher contacted the DOE to report there had been cheating on the MCAS student tests. She expected the state to come in and conduct an investigation, but she never heard a word from the DOE. She

was not certain what would happen when she reported the case and had low expectations for DOE. When her low expectations were met, she did not feel surprised. In both cases, however, the expectations the teachers had for the DOE were low. One teacher expected there would be no response, and when that happened, it was not that big of a surprise. The other teacher got a response, and was surprised because her expectations of the DOE were exceeded. In other words, any response that is more than no response from the state is seen as a positive experience by those in the school. No response from the state is actually expected, and consequently not seen as negative.

There is an unspoken professional code in the schools that was implicit in my interviews of principals and teachers. For the most part, principals and teachers in the schools interact with one another or with the district staff. The traditional hierarchy of the public education system is followed with the DOE at the top, the district in the middle, and the school at the bottom. Even in the instances when teachers felt a complaint should be lodged about the conditions within the school, or the lack of principal leadership in their school prior to being declared underperforming, the complaints were lodged to the district by teachers, who took a considered risk in doing so.

For a teacher to go above the head of his or her principal is seen as a symbolic and perilous move. Even in the difficult environments they worked in, in their stories, teachers hesitated to contact the district staff directly and rarely did more than talk about such acts amongst themselves. Likewise, a principal would be considered insubordinate if he or she were to go over the superintendent's head and contact the DOE directly to complain about a lack of resources or neglect by the district. Early intervention opens the

door for the DOE to go directly to the school and ask the principal and staff about what is going on in their school.

School Panel Review

The School Panel Review is a visit designed to use performance and strategic criteria gained from information gathered through interviews with staff and observations at the underperforming school. Considered to be narrowly focused, clear, and concise by those at the state level, the visit is aimed at getting a sense of the school beyond MCAS scores, which trigger a potential visit in the first place. The most cited strength of the School Panel Review by state participants is that it is concise and clear. Focused on the school improvement plan, the state panelists are required to answer two key questions: 1) does the school have a sound improvement plan, and 2) does the school have the ability to implement the plan? The simplicity of these two questions makes it possible for panelists to hone in on two items within the complexities of any school and turn to documentation and evidence from observations and interviews within the school to answer them. Dianne explains, "Well, I think it is a very clear and focused system. And, in the sense that it cuts right to the chase, it does not try to figure out everything that is going on in every school" (Dianne, DOE). The simple approach of asking two key questions allows room for the state to examine the school within the unique context of a particular school.

State Level

Making room for the local context is an important element in early intervention, but still there are challenges to the School Panel Review. While the conciseness and

clarity are strengths, they are also part of its weaknesses. It is so narrowly focused and omits many other dimensions of a school. For example, often there are good activities and improvement initiatives that exist within a school that are not captured by or connected to the improvement plan. The School Panel Review overlooks the whole school for the school improvement plan.

Another challenge of the School Panel Review is its brevity. The panelists convene over a two day period, but only spend one day in the school. The first day is for reviewing the improvement plan and interviewing the district superintendent and underperforming school principal. The second day is spent observing classrooms, interviewing staff and conducting focus groups. At the end of the second day the panel must arrive at answers to the two questions. Overall it is a huge "intellectual commitment" (Christie, ABC Consulting) on the part of panelist practitioners, the DOE liaison and the ABC Consultants.

From the state perspective, there is certainly a varied response from school principals and teachers during the School Panel Review. State level participants identified a number of factors that they felt affected the way in which the state team is received by a school. Factors that affect the response include: 1) the degree to which the principal understands the process; 2) the degree to which the staff understand the process; 3) the degree to which the district is involved in preparing the school for the process; 4) the degree to which the DOE liaison is involved in helping the principal prepare for the process; 5) the selection of the "right people" to participate on the panel; and 6) the ability of the panelists to take an "inquirer" approach rather than an "evaluator" approach.

From the state perspective each of these can make the difference between a cooperative and a conflict ridden experience.

Within the School Panel Review process there are several important points in time and the reaction of those in the school changes in stages. The important points include: the identification and notification of the school for a School Panel Review, the beginning of the visit, the end of the visit, and the release of the report with the results of the visit/diagnosis of a school as underperforming.

When a school is identified as potentially underperforming, Daphne first calls the superintendent and asks him or her to contact the school principal to notify him or her that he or she will be receiving a letter identifying the school as potentially underperforming from the DOE. During the phone call with the superintendent, Daphne discusses the school or schools on the list for review and whether they will benefit from such a visit. It is the first opportunity for the superintendent to discuss the actual context of the school beyond the numbers (student test results). The professional courtesy of a phone call to the superintendent respects the traditional hierarchy of the public education system. It communicates to the superintendent that early intervention in an underperforming school is really a partnership between the district and the DOE. Additionally, it serves as an opportunity for the superintendent to interact directly with the school principal and potentially open up the lines of communication between the two.

After the letter is sent out, the DOE liaison contacts the school principal to set up a pre-visit meeting. At the meeting the principal is given a binder of information detailing the School Panel Review process. The principal is given assignments to be completed. The principal must submit a "leadership report" discussing his or her role

implementing the school improvement plan and a schedule of classroom observations, interviews and focus groups during the panel visit. Additionally, the DOE liaison administers an anonymous teacher survey that is sent directly to the DOE, which compiles the results that are included in the materials for the panelists to review prior to the visit.

From the point of the pre-visit meeting on, the DOE liaison handles the logistical matters related to the School Panel Review visit. More importantly the DOE liaison is responsible for demystifying the process and managing the anxiety of the principal. The DOE liaison is the first state contact the school has. Dan explains that the initial pre-visit meeting is, "Just to introduce myself...[and] trying to get them [principals] to be relaxed…" (Dan, DOE) about the visit. Recognizing the level of anxiety those in the school feel, he really tries to emphasize that the DOE consists of individual people trying to help schools. He discusses how that helps to shape the first visit between the DOE and the underperforming school principal.

> [It's] definitely humanizing it… [Y]ou know the DOE is just people too, and I know it doesn't sound like we're there to help. You're out there looking to see if something's underperforming or not, but like I said, it can be good. I can be a really, really good process to go through. (Dan, DOE)

As a DOE liaison, Dan emphasizes the need for cooperation with the school and really tries to make a personal connection with the school principal. Recognizing the anxiety among the staff in a school that is being visited, Daphne tries to assure principals that it is a supportive process and "the beginning of a partnership" between the DOE and the school. Dan tried to reiterate the same idea by letting them know that even if it feels bad, it is a "really good process to go through."

The message that the School Panel Review is a supportive partnership with the state and a "really good process" evidently has been heard and understood at some level among those at the local level. State participants report that after several underperforming review cycles, the response of the school principals and teachers towards the School Panel Review have changed to be less combative and more accepting. DOE staff attribute the change to the process itself and to a wider understanding of the process among principals and teachers in the schools.

The devastation of being identified by the state for a visit has lessened among underperforming school educators, but still the DOE administrators find that there is a complexity to the response of school principals and teachers. Dianne finds that though there seems to be an understanding that it is not the end of the world, there is still a range in the responses from those in the school. She explains,

> It can be demoralizing. I think especially in schools where people feel they've been working really hard…I think others are not surprised. You know? I think that sometimes there's embarrassment. I think there's a range of response, but I think there's a sort of first response and that changes over time. (Dianne, DOE)

The complexity may be attributed to the difference between the educators' organizational identity and professional identity. Organizationally, educators in the school are more than likely "not surprised" because they have seen the student test scores and know the challenges the face in the school. Professionally, however, the label of potentially underperforming and the state coming to visit the school for these reasons my feel shameful. Chuck refers to this as the "emotional level" when he discusses the reaction of the school educators to the panel visit.

> I think there's a lot of caution. I think that unless the principal has done a marvelous job with the staff. …[A]t a personal and an emotional level so that they're able to believe that this is really a group that's here to look at what we're doing to help us make some change. Unless that exists, there's a certain amount of suspicion and fear and 'what does this mean to us?' (Chuck, ABC Consulting)

In general the state level participants noted that even when the response was negative from the school at first, the manner of the visit and the pre-visit connections between the school and the state have lessened the levels of embarrassment. The message of support and the professional and humane nature of the panelists help to inject the principal and educators with a message of hope and support for improving the school.

The pre-visit meetings between the principal and the DOE liaison are to prepare the School Panel Review visit; however, the state participants find that the level of preparation by the school and district remains varied and is dependent upon the superintendent and principal. Daphne discusses the range in response of school principals.

> Principals who take this seriously meet with their staff, give everyone a copy of our protocol. We give interview questions so they can be very well prepared. Some principals do nothing. And, when we actually visit the school, and we have conversations with the teachers, we have teachers saying, 'What is this all about anyway?' (Daphne, DOE)

ABC Consultants finds the same variation in preparedness. Chuck explains his dismay at the lack of preparation in some schools,

> … [T]his is something that… regularly amazes me: the difference in how a district and a school will prepare for [a School Panel Review] visit. I mean there are places where principals do totally nothing. Absolutely nothing until the last week or so, and then they'll throw together a schedule and that will generally inform people [in the school] that there's group coming to explore some of

> the things that are going on in the school. (Chuck, ABC Consulting)

Over and over again state level participant refer to early intervention as a "transparent process" meaning the information about what the DOE is looking for at any given point in time, including the School Panel Review visit is made available. Beyond providing schools with documentation about the process, the information is made available to the public on the DOE's website. Finding an underperforming school at which the principal and the teachers are not prepared for the panelists' questions indicates to the state that there are serious problems within the school.

Regardless of the degree of preparation, generally the state panel is met with a school principal and staff who are "apprehensive – that is the first feeling and most predominant feeling," according to Christie. Other comments about the first impression the school has of the state team reveal a similar tone.

> …they're apprehensive about the whole process. You know, 'You're going to take over our school. You're going to close our school… You're going to shut us down. You've mislabeled us. You're all wrong.' …So, …they're very apprehensive, defensive, …they're worried. (Christie, ABC Consulting)

The punishing and deterrent perceptions the educators in the schools have about the state and new school accountability policy are exposed in Christie's comment. The deterrent system that is perceived by the local stakeholders comes out during the first face to face interaction between the school educators and the state panelists. The "distrust" refers to the lack of faith the educators have in the state's ability to identify a school as underperforming, and the defensiveness toward the state must be countered in order to progress or begin to change the working relationship so that the school staff are able to take on the improvement initiatives on their own. Though the response is varied, the

team is seen as "the state" and is an intervention into the school. There is an implicit perception by the school that "the state is out to get us" (Christie, ABC Consulting). And Christie goes on to say, "I don't think I've ever been in a situation [when] the state was referenced in that positive light from the outset."

The beginning of a School Panel Review reflects a less than positive perception of the DOE by those in the school, and those in the DOE clearly understand the challenge they face in overcoming it. Daphne acknowledges the feelings of the principals and teacher in a school that is visited.

> They…really feel awful. They don't like it. The…first response is very defensive. It is sort of a grief cycle. You know? At first you don't believe it, and you can think of every reason why it's not happening. And then, you sort of get angry. You know? That is kind of the next thing. You are really upset about this. It's not right. How could this have happened? And then you finally have to accept it. (Daphne, DOE)

The state's recognition of the difficulty educators have with the process, and letting individuals within the school go through the "grief cycle" without reacting negatively, allows the school principal and teachers to process the idea of state intervention and eventually move into acceptance and cooperation with the state.

Though state participants feel the individuals in the school are much more accepting than in the past, nervousness and tension among the educators in the school exists during the visit. Being at the front line of the School Panel Review, Dan explains the first encounters,

> They [school staff] are nervous. There is no two ways about it. Sometimes you'd walk out of classes, and someone would kind of give…a look behind you. Or, they'll stop you in the hallway, and they'll start showing you volumes of paper and things. Projects they've worked on. Just to show you, 'We're doing this. We're

> doing this. We're doing this.' It's all good. It's nice that they are, but it's not exactly what we're there to see. (Dan, DOE)

First impressions are lasting, and the professional manner and regular assurance the DOE liaisons, ABC Consultants, and the panelist practitioners take during their first encounter quickly changes the reaction of those in the school. Panelists' actions serve as indicators for the school principal and staff that the process is professional. This begins to change the reaction of those in the school toward the state visit. Dan describes the phenomenon,

> After a very short while, after you conduct interviews, they'll, many times, though I have no specific data for it...someone would say, 'Well, that's it?'
>
> I'd say, 'Yeah, that's it.'
>
> They'd say, 'Wow, I really expected this to be really hard.' [I'd say], 'You just have to tell us how your plan evolved. That's all. And, what's your role in that, and if you can tell us that, then we're pretty happy and you should be too.' So they would be much more relaxed…by the time we left. (Dan, DOE)

Dianne supports Dan's comment when she explains that at first the state (panel) is seen as the "interloper," but once the first few interactions occur between the panel and members of the school staff, the word gets around fast.

Indeed, state stakeholders find that there are certainly at least some "people in the school [who] actually seem happy that someone is recognizing that they're in trouble" (Dianne, DOE). At first the process may be frightening in and of itself, but in the comments from DOE and ABC Consulting staff, there is an undercurrent that arises after the initial defensiveness and nervous reactions the staff in the school are welcoming of the help and support. State participants believe educators in the school are really afraid of being "blamed" for the underperformance and when they realize it is not a "finger

pointing exercise" the attitude changes and the perception of the state visitors becomes more positive.

The change in attitude is largely influenced by the panelists themselves, who always include a DOE liaison, ABC Consultants, and several practitioners. Their actions and styles of inquiry dominate the opinions the local level stakeholders are forming about the state. Consequently, selecting the "right people" for the role is imperative to being able to build a cooperative working relationship with the school. Caitlin hits upon the idea that the practitioners bring an, "I'm in your position," perspective, which lends credibility to the visit for those within the school.

Having the "right people" on the panel is important and the management of the panel by the Chair sets the tone of the visit. Chuck talks about the challenge of overseeing practitioner panelists.

> I think the biggest challenge is to yank the predispositions out of practitioners. You know right away if somebody is going to go in there with a predisposition, and the difference between that type of person and somebody who is going to go in with an open-mind and say, 'You know, we see this in writing, but we have to see how it's operationalized, and what it feels like.' So if you've got a good group of people, it makes a big difference. (Chuck, ABC Consulting)

Even more than managing the panel and having a good group of people, Christie talks about the importance of selecting practitioner panelists who work in similar situations and types of school as the educators in the school that is being visited. Christie explains,

> Well, practitioners are the big strength. If you can have a team in which the practitioners' experience mirrors the school context that's a very powerful team because those people really can know quickly, you know, sort of what the lay of the land is. (Christie, ABC Consulting)

If things have gone well in terms of the being able to allay the fear of the principal and gaining a degree of trust among the staff after they realize the state is just a team of people who are professional and courteous, a positive relationship begins to develop between the panel and the school. Caitlin discussed how "people [in the school] are nervous," but "a lot of people are frustrated with what's going on [in the school], so they're ready to talk." Over the short period of time most have found that the school principal and staff are nervous, but they are willing to get to the point in the "grief cycle" where they are able to discuss the challenges the school is facing.

By all state stakeholders' accounts the majority of the School Panel Reviews do go well. This is different from the earlier years of new school accountability implementation.

> In the early years, of the very first few years, it was an extremely antagonistic reception of the idea of potentially underperforming. Schools denied…that there was any underperformance, that…it wasn't their responsibility… So, there was very little constructive conversation emanating from the school regarding – it was all defensive. …[T]hat was in the early years. It has migrated somewhat over the years to be more…constructive. (Christie, ABC Consulting)

The change shows a wider understanding of early intervention among the public education stakeholders. With the change comes a change in understanding of the policy from a deterrent to an enabling process. While this may have occurred at the school level at a later point, there is an indication that it occurs earlier in the process, or at least the perception of the policy as deterrent begins to erode earlier than during the first year of implementation. A contributing factor to the erosion of the school's deterrent perceptions may be the DOE's attitude as professed by Daphne, "It's not about blame. It's about moving forward."

After the School Panel Review visit, a report detailing the findings of the panel is submitted to the commissioner of the DOE. He then makes a determination about the school. The superintendent is notified by Daphne and told that one or more of the schools reviewed in his or her district will be declared underperforming, and that he or she should notify the school principal because the letter from the DOE with a copy of the report is being sent out in the next few days. Again, professional courtesy is paid to the district. It is used as an opportunity to strengthen the DOE and district relationship, and is an opportunity to encourage a stronger district and school relationship.

After the notification Daphne goes to the district and meets with both the superintendent and principal. She discusses the meeting,

> And basically, here is what I say, 'I'm here. You can put a face to the Department of Education. This is your opportunity to talk to me about why we got it wrong, if that is what you think.' And, so some principals take advantage of that and really spout off about the DOE. And, then ultimately I say, 'It is what it is. So, here are the choices. We want to work with you now. We know you don't like this label. We wish there were a better way too.' (Daphne, DOE)

The DOE Director allows for the underperforming school principal to vent and uses the meeting as a push to start changing things within the school. She reinforces the partnership with the DOE and then details the next steps in the early intervention process.

Underperforming Schools

The principals interviewed were not present during the initial School Panel Review, but teachers, who were present, indicated that they knew the school was underperforming, as did the former principal, long before the school was selected for a state visit. Bridget recalls, "I wasn't [surprised]. We had a feeling. I mean we were told this was probably going to happen just by the MCAS scores." The teachers in the two

schools vacillated between feeling nervous or intimidated and feeling like they could use the help and let the state see what we deal with every day.

Being selected for a School Panel Review is a big deal in the school. Teachers felt unsure about the process, though each indicated they had received information, questions, and schedules from their principal ahead of time. Still, the teachers did not feel like they clearly understood what was going on. As Anita explains, "There was no big picture." They simply understood "the state is coming because we're underperforming." One teacher describes the feeling in the building once the school was selected for a DOE visit,

> … [T]here were mixed feelings. There was, 'OK. Come on in state. I'm going to tell you everything that's going on. I'm going to… complain. I'm gonna tell you everything that's happening.' And other people were like, 'You know, I'm nervous. Am I going to be accountable? Am I going to lose my job? What's going to happen here?' So, there was a lot of mixed feelings going on. (Brenda, teacher, Babson Elementary)

The mixed reaction ranged from tension because of the stress of being identified, to recognition that the school and the teachers needed help. This point was discussed by many of the teachers in the schools.

> …[I]t was tense. The principal you could tell was on edge. She was definitely on edge. She was nervous… She was new to administration, very new in the system, and she had a lot on her plate. There was a lot going on… It was tense. It was very tense. (Brenda, teacher, Babson Elementary)

> We knew we needed some serious changes, and uh, so, I think most people were looking forward to it. It can be sort of intimidating, but I think the general feel was, 'Come on in and help us.' (Amelia, teacher, Alfred Elementary)

Despite the tension and intimidation of a state visit, the hope that finally someone, even if it was someone from the state, would listen to them and see for themselves what

was going on in the school was clearly articulated. One teacher described her mixed feelings about the state coming in over the heads of the district, but knowing that it was the school's only hope of improvement. Anita explains,

> But, at that point, I welcomed it. Because I said, this has got to mean something good because just getting to interview with DOE. They interviewed all of us at different times. Just to tell them…we have no textbooks. We don't have [supplies]. We ran out of paper. We ran out of pencils. You know?
>
> They were like, 'What do you mean you have no text books?'
>
> I was like, 'You know textbooks? We don't have them.'
>
> They were like, 'What? You don't?'
>
> [I said,] 'Papers, pencils, that's on our own. It's up to us.'
> (Anita, teacher, Alfred Elementary)

The DOE arrives to a tense yet conciliatory staff within the school. The schoolteachers really want to tell somebody, who will listen, that they have no "textbooks" or that they "ran out of paper" and to get a reaction of concern from the DOE makes the risk of sharing the information worth it. The tone of the DOE visit feels like they are being understood and gives a sense of reciprocity to those in the school. It gives those in the school hope.

To the DOE's advantage during early intervention, the staff in the schools found the panelists to be professional and courteous, and it gave the state credibility with the educators in the school. In turn, the teachers were more willing to share information because they saw the professionalism of the panelists. Brenda explained, "[The panelists] were very pleasant and you know they were very nice. They…told us their background and what they did. They…weren't pointing fingers at anybody or anything like that."

Having the "right people" on the state team was important to many of the teachers and contributes to a sense of DOE reciprocity within the school.

Teachers in the schools supported the state level participants' notion that matching the experience of the practitioner panelists with that of the underperforming school as important to the reliability of early intervention. It is important to the teachers to have panelists reviewing their school who have similar backgrounds and experiences as they have within their school.

> I think [the panelists] were very nice. You know? They were principals. I don't know how long they were teaching, or if they had ever been teachers. You know? Or, if they even taught in a school like this, you know? Or, did they come from some little suburban town where they don't have the same kind of problems that we do. I have no idea. (Bridget, teacher, Babson Elementary)

> I probably wish [the panel] had some Hispanic people because over 80% of [the] student population is Hispanic. I think that would have been, you know that's a huge thing that's missing from the school and other schools like it that nobody gets – the language barrier. (Anita, teacher, Alfred Elementary)

Teachers are quick to identify deficiencies of the panelists. From the DOE, to ABC Consulting, to the practitioners, it is important to have people from similar types of districts and schools because otherwise the teachers felt they "don't have the same kind of problems."

While neither of the school's panels were a perfect reflection of the schools, all in all the teachers felt they were professional and courteous and just having them listen to what the teachers had to say gave them some credibility. Adeline explained that, "Just talking to them, [you could see among] the students and the teachers around here, there

was a difference. They had hope. There was hope" (Adeline, teacher, Alfred Elementary).

When the report was released, each of the teachers stated that they knew the school would be declared underperforming, so it was not a surprise when it happened. Generally, teachers believed the report was an honest articulation of what was really going on in the school, which contributed to the credibility of the state team. They felt listened to, finally.

Still, teachers expressed confusion about what the label of underperforming meant. They wondered if it was a sanction on the teaching in the school, and how it impacted them. With the principal who was on the way out the door as the primary communication link about the process to the district and the DOE, teachers had little information about what it all meant and had little opportunity to find out. Teachers expressed their confusion.

> Well, [the school being declared underperforming] was disappointing. It was. Because my thing is, is that kids here are low. The kids are low. You know, most of the city is, but they have no idea how hard a lot of us have worked. They're low, yes, but they've come a long way some of these kids. And, that is what really upsets me… (Brenda, teacher, Babson Elementary)

> We didn't really know what to expect. We kind of had a lot of questions. What does this mean for the building? Can they come in and take it over? There wasn't fear. Nobody was afraid. Nobody felt, 'Oh, we've been caught,' because we all knew how hard we'd all been working. With nothing you work a lot harder. So, we weren't afraid for [the state] to come in. We thought once they came in, now they'll see it. Now we have them here. (Anita, teacher, Alfred Elementary)

Uncomfortable with the process, and wondering if the report was an indictment upon the teachers themselves, questions about the process abound. In each of the teachers'

explanations mingles disappointment and confusion because they did not know what was going to happen next, along with a gratefulness that something is happening to change things in the school. In the uneasiness of understanding the process, and the more than likely removal of the top administrator (the principal), there was a dense feeling of confusion and concern.

Perhaps at least partially because of the confusion and concern or not knowing the "big picture," turnover in schools declared underperforming is high. It is a classic symptom of what happens after a school is declared underperforming. One of the teachers described that response,

> A lot of the staff was like, 'You know, I'm out of here.' 'I'm out of here,' was a big reaction… a lot of people did do that. That's when the transfers were coming out, and they put in for transfers. 'I don't want to be here. I don't want the state breathing down my neck. I could lose my job.' That was the major feeling. (Brenda, teacher, Babson Elementary)

Fear of the unknown is at least part of the reason for the turnover. Additionally, the timing of the district transfer period matches up with the timing of the school being declared underperforming.

By the end of the school year, an underperforming school more than likely has a new principal who must replace a large percentage of the teachers who have transferred. The staffing changes alone contribute to transforming the underperforming schools and make it easier for the new principal to implement new improvement strategies. What is lost from teachers leaving because the school is declared underperforming is unknown.

Sincerity, reciprocity between the DOE and the school, and clear communication are major strands interwoven throughout the initial process. At that point involvement between the DOE staff and the underperforming school staff has increased and the

expectations for future involvement are clarified. Though trust in each party's intention to implement the policy is varied, the professional nature of the visit and sincerity of the message of support is embedded throughout the visit. Much of the defensiveness and combativeness in reaction to a state visit is lessened or eliminated during this phase, and thus the actions taken during the School Panel Review begin to alter the school staff's perceptions of a deterrent system that can cause a defensive or paralyzing reaction to an enabling system that relies upon the internal expertise of those within the school.

Fact Finding Review

The Fact Finding Review is the state's diagnostic criteria stage of early intervention. Prior to the Fact Finding Review, there has already been an introduction to the state (School Panel Review), so the Fact Finding Review Panel is seen as another state visit like one which the educators within the school have already experienced. From the perspective of those at the state level, the way the Fact Finding Review is received by the school is affected by factors similar to the School Panel Reviews including the level of preparedness, the level of involvement of the district, the level of understanding of the process, the right people on the panel and their professional manner. The Fact Finding Review is different from the Panel Review in that it is intended to provide a comprehensive diagnosis of a specific school. It moves beyond simply looking at the school improvement plan to conducting classroom observations and in-depth interviews with the principal and staff.

The State Level

Though these visits are supposed to be customized for the school, the state has developed a uniform protocol and schedule for the Fact Finding Review. Still, the chair of the team emphasizes that, "it is really flexible" (Daphne, DOE). The information from the Fact Finding Report is to support the school. It is, therefore, centered on the unique context of a particular school and is negotiated to fit the needs of a school. Daphne describes the evolution of the Fact Finding Review,

> The Fact Finding Review…is something we've struggled with. We would like it to have a different feel for the school... The Fact Finding Review is really a team that's coming in to give you feedback now. So, we urge principals and their staffs to prepare a set of questions that they are looking for answers to. For example, if the school has gone about the business of…developing a schedule that uses common planning time, principals may say, 'You know, I'm not sure how my teachers are really using that. If they are using it for planning for students or if it is just a session, you know where they sit around and complain about kids. And, I can't get to all of them. So, I would like some feedback on that.' In that case the team would structure their schedule to include observations of common planning time meetings. (Daphne, DOE)

During the Fact Finding Review, the introductions and first impressions are over. The DOE immediately tries to engage the school principal and teachers in helping the team diagnose the problems in the school by having them "prepare a set of questions they are looking for answers to" (Daphne, DOE). The team is engaging them to work as partners with the state team and is supporting staff members of the school by helping them to find those answers. The Fact Finding Review marks a transition in the working relationship between the state and the school, one in which they must both actively participate.

The state's emphasis on making the Fact Finding Review feel different to those in the school is one of its strengths. The difference is in the participation of the educators as

well as the amount of time spent at the school, which allows the state team to conduct a closer in-depth analysis of the underperforming school. If the implementation of the review works as planned, the analysis and diagnosis are guided by the principal, who quickly validates findings as systemic problems or discredits findings as out of context. Daphne describes the review as "very collaborative." As part of the collaborative approach, the school leadership is provided with feedback on a daily basis.

There have been two important changes in the Fact Finding portion of intervention that, in the eyes of the state, have improved the reception of the state team. First, the time frame was altered so that both the School Panel and Fact Finding visits are conducted in the same academic year, which helps the school not to feel abandoned by the state after being declared underperforming. Involvement of the DOE liaison over a shorter time period creates continuity for those within the school, and it allowed the school team to enter into the PIM process with an in-depth analysis of some of the issues that exist within the school.

Second, to the extent possible, the DOE now assigns the same ABC Consulting team leaders that conducted a school's School Panel Review to its Fact Finding Review. Cited as a very influential change to the process, it allows for the relationship that had begun to develop during the previous visit to continue. It also contributes to a deeper diagnosis of the school's needs during the Fact Finding Review. As Chuck states,

> Well, I think that if you've been able to establish some kind of connection with a school on a [School] Panel Review, and they felt that…the relationships were positive and that the nature of the visit, the content, [was] positive, that it's helpful for the school to see the same people. (Chuck, ABC Consulting)

Clearly, it is a change in implementation that takes into consideration relationship building between the state and the school.

At the Fact Finding Review, the ABC Consulting team leads the panel of practitioners without the presence of the DOE liaison. Dianne explains the reason to not have a DOE presence,

> I think it's to…ensure a level of objectivity. You know, that there's not investment by the DOE about what is found at the school. And, it's also to allow for another practitioner to be on the panel… During the Fact Finding they're really spending a lot of time in classrooms and really trying to get at the teaching and learning and the curriculum and instruction of what might be the gaps in that. So…for that role it really does need to have people who are classroom people and teachers and principals and people who supervise teachers or principals…function best in that role. (Dianne, DOE)

There is no DOE member on the staff to ensure "objectivity," though it is not clear that the local level stakeholders understand there is no one from the state on the panel. To underperforming school staff it is a state visit.

While objectivity may be one goal, it is likely that the decision is influenced by limitations in the DOE's capacity to send a person to a four day review. Dianne also remarked on a capacity issue in matching DOE skills with the demands of the review. The intent of the visit is focused on curriculum and instruction, areas where the DOE staff generally have a limited level of expertise. It is better to have practitioners who are currently in schools in this role. The point is important because it shows the DOE staff have a self-awareness about its organizational limitations. Dianne expressed a level of understanding of the DOE's strengths and weaknesses with regard to the early intervention process. Rather than cover them up, the choice was to expand capacity to

address the limitations. At once, it shows respect for the educators at the local level and a self-awareness of the DOE's limitations that might surprise the local educators.

Absence of the DOE places the ABC Consultants in charge of the state panel. ABC Consultants find that being the person in charge and having direct contact with the school, unlike that School Panel Review when it is the responsibility of the DOE liaison, makes them better able to manage the process and the working relationship between themselves and the school. During the visits the school is made to understand that the ABC Consulting team is representing the DOE, as are the panel practitioners. From the perspective of the ABC Consultants, it is unlikely that those in the school know that they are not the DOE. Put simply, at the school level the distinction was not important.

To open up a rapport with the school, the first session focuses on discussing the report from the previous state visit (School Panel Review report). In an effort to enlist the school leadership's cooperation and as an act of sincerity, the review team asks what the school team thought about the report, what they got wrong and what they got right. Because the information from the initial meeting shapes and influences what the review panel looks for during the review, Caitlin believes,

> … it's a great way to start from those discussions of, 'Did you read the report?' 'Were we right?' 'Was it accurate?' 'What did you agree with, what didn't you?' And, right away you've got a further understanding of what you already knew based on what their impressions are. I mean they're the people that need to give you the information. (Caitlin, ABC Consulting)

The meeting requires the school leadership to put forth information, and the way in which the state team listens is an act of reciprocity that sends a message of respect for the school principal's professional opinion and the team's willingness to listen and incorporate what the principal has to say. Caitlin articulates the need for cooperation with those in the

underperforming school because they "need to give you the information." Chuck adds that he uses the approach to gain the cooperation of the school.

> I think that…if you're able to convince people that you might have missed stuff, you know? If we got something wrong or that we got it right, but to be open to the possibility that we didn't get it right. You know? OK, so we were there for one day [during the School Panel Review], now you've got to take a second look at it or tell us what, tell us what we misinterpreted. (Chuck, ABC Consulting)

The willingness of the Chair of the panel (Chuck) to admit honestly that the first panel (School Panel Review) may have missed something and to listen to what was right and wrong within the report, strengthens working relationships by conveying a sincere interest in the opinion of the educators in the schools.

As in the School Panel Review, information about what happens in the initial meetings of the Fact Finding Review travels fast among the educators within the school. Christie found that the "tone" of the opening session creates a relationship with more than just the school people that are in the initial meeting.

> … the opening sessions sets a tone that's constructive and positive. Then I think that you'd be amazed how fast word travels around the school. You would be astounded. By the end of the first session, we usually have a quick break, you know, maybe a bathroom stop, and then we're out in the classrooms, visiting classrooms, and interviewing teachers and word has already spread as to who we are. You know, like these are real people. These people know what they're talking about, you know? And, we'll hear that as we interview teachers through the day. (Christie, ABC Consulting)

The "constructive and positive" tone of the first meeting sets the tone for the rest of the Fact Finding Review. The understanding of the human aspect of the process that ABC Consultants bring to early interventions really helps to build a working relationship between the DOE and the underperforming school. Every action the panel takes during a

visit is being scrutinized by the educators in the underperforming school, and the panel, led by ABC Consultants is made aware of the need to be consistent, professional, and respectful because they want to send a positive message.

The Fact Finding Review brings new challenges to the school. A declaration of underperformance triggers the review, and the first opportunity for the teachers in the school to see the state is when the Fact Finding Review Panel walks through the school doors. Despite the variation in response, generally there is a change in the teachers' reactions, because they are no longer fighting the "threat" of the "underperforming" label. With the deterrent system's initial threat past, the educators in the school need to figure out what is next for them.

DOE staff and ABC Consultants believe it is that question and the supportive and respectful nature of the Fact Finding Review panel that pushes the educators within the school closer to acceptance of the state intervention and all that it brings. Caitlin discusses that difference.

> Well, it's not the experience in the [School Panel] review, but they are more likely to admit they do need help. We've told them that they need help by the time the Fact Finding had got there. (Caitlin, ABC Consulting)

Getting the school staff to the point of admitting they need help brings them that much closer to accepting the enabling implementation style of early intervention.

Throughout the Fact Finding Review the messages of being courteous, professional, respectful, and attentive to the principal and staff in the school are reinforced the by the state team. The ability of the school principal to direct the process and the flexibility of the ABC Consulting team contributes to moving the school from a

deterrent understanding of the process to that of an enabling process. As Daphne explains,

> So, sometimes despite the fact that a school is found to be underperforming, if we can help them understand that there are things they need to do differently. They don't necessarily need to throw out the baby with the bathwater, but there are better ways to approach what they are doing, then they come to PIM with a sort of a more positive attitude. 'OK, so this is how the DOE is going to help us figure this out.' (Daphne, DOE)

Daphne's description of helping the school to understand that things can be done differently also discloses a consistent theme among all of the state level participants. At no time did any of the DOE staff members indicate they had answers as to how to improve a school. Each mention of school improvement focused on helping the school "figure" out how to improve and the belief that there are good things going on in each school.

Once again, to convey the need for a working relationship with the underperforming school, at the end of the Fact Finding Review, the ABC Consulting team meets with the school principal and/or leadership team to debrief and discuss the final findings of the panel. At that time, the DOE liaison, who is assigned to be the state level person involved with underperforming school team during PIM and after the school's improvement plan is approved by the Board of Education to monitor the underperforming school for two years, comes back into the picture.

Dan, a DOE liaison describes his entry back into the early intervention process, "I mean by that time I would have a decent relationship with the principal." In fact, the DOE liaison has become the state level advocate for the underperforming school. ABC Consultants find that the DOE liaison's role as an advocate for the school during the last

Fact Finding Review meeting with the principal, reinforces the supportive nature of DOE's partnership with the school. According to the consultants, DOE liaisons truly take on the role of support and present an "overly rosy" picture of what is going on in the school. The overly rosy perspective of the DOE liaison can cause some conflict between the ABC Consultants as the final report is written. Most of the conflicts are ironed out quietly and internally, but it can be a challenge for the consultants.

Admitting that he may take an overly supportive role toward the underperforming school, the DOE liaison explained that during the Fact Finding Review exit interviews, he really likes coming in at the end and playing the good cop to the ABC Consulting's bad cop. The exit interview is an opportunity to improve or establish the DOE liaison's working relationship with the principal and educators in the underperforming school, and the DOE liaisons tend to take advantage of it. Caitlin explains the dynamic of the exit interview being a "stepping stone" toward developing a positive relationship with the underperforming school.

> [D]oes [the DOE liaison's] presence there help in building a relationship with the school? I think it should be a stepping stone. I mean at this point [the school is underperforming]. …You've been determined underperforming, and you don't have a choice but to work with the state for the upcoming year plus. So, is that a good first stepping stone in establishing a relationship? I think it could be a very good stepping stone. (Caitlin, ABC Consulting)

The Underperforming Schools

Differences between the two schools are most striking during the Fact Finding Review. Because of changes in implementation, Alfred Elementary's new principal and staff had been through the state's PIM training prior to going through the Fact Finding Review. The team and school were therefore acutely aware of the tools, strategies and

expectations the state had for them and their school. Babson Elementary's old principal and staff did not have as clear a picture about what would happen to them and the school. In fact, the district announced that the principal would be replaced during the state visit, which added to the confusion among teachers.

Both schools' teachers reported responding honestly to the panelists who interviewed them and observed their classes. In each school, the faculty believed they should "tell it like it is." They felt as though the Fact Finding Review posed an opportunity to make some real changes in the school. According to teachers, they hoped the changes they had been clamoring at the district for would be heard by the state and their interviews with panelists gave them the opportunity to tell them what had not been heard by the district.

The degree to which the teachers felt nervousness was different between the two schools for reasons stated previously. When the Fact Finding Review team visited, Babson Elementary participants reported that "they were nervous" (Brenda, teacher, Babson Elementary), but were still forthcoming with the state team.

> …[People in the school] were very honest. I know that. They were like, 'Look, I'm going to tell it how it is, and this is what I'm upset about.' They talked about the district. They talked about the principal. And, you know, some people were really willing to get their feelings out and let's bring everything to the table here, because it needs to be told. This is why the school is underperforming. (Brenda, teacher, Babson Elementary)

Babson Elementary teachers were nervous, but according to Brenda, they were still willing to take a chance. They saw the opportunity and took advantage of it.

The nervousness level was much higher at Babson than at Alfred. The teachers at Alfred Elementary had greater familiarity with the DOE, having already been through the PIM,

and had begun to implement changes within the school. Therefore, they felt less threatened by the visit as the comment below indicates.

> Well we, the building always welcomed the DOE and anybody involved in the process. There was never any anger or contention from the teachers toward them. We felt good about it because we wanted help. We wanted somebody to say, to do something. We welcomed them. (Anita, teacher, Alfred Elementary)

As with the School Panel Reviews, participants found the Fact Finding Review team to be professional and pleasant. Brenda states, "I mean when I was interviewed, I was very comfortable. The people were very nice and I told the others too." The word about what happens during the interviews and observations spreads fast around the school as with Brenda's experience. So, while the principal and staff were nervous during the review, the style and manner of the state team did allay the nervousness enough for those in the school to be honest and comfortable with the state team. Alfred Elementary teachers reported the same. Again, their expectations were low, and when they found that the panelists "weren't demeaning" (Anita, teacher, Alfred Elementary) or "grumpy" (Adeline, teacher Alfred Elementary) they were happy with them.

In both schools staff expressed doubt about how much of an understanding of a school's issues a state team could get when the team is only in the school for a few days. In Alfred Elementary the visit was conducted in October after Mr. Arnold, the new principal, and the school team had been through PIM. Mr. Arnold felt the feedback from the state team was valuable, but the timing of the visit was awkward because so many dramatic changes (e.g. new principal, implementation of a new improvement plan) had already occurred. At Babson Elementary the school was visited prior to PIM, however the timing of the visit still posed a big issue for those in the school. The team visited in

June during the last few weeks of school. Teachers felt that arriving a few weeks before school ends is not representative of what is actually going on in the school. For both schools the timing of the Fact Finding Review was awkward for different reasons, and timing of visits turns out to be an influential factor in how the state is perceived by school principals and teachers.

The state team met with district representatives over the course of the Fact Finding Review. A teacher commented about the district during the Fact Finding Review,

> I remember walking by going, 'What are [the district administrators] talking about? They have no idea about this school.' …I remember saying that to myself. I looked and I just went, you know, I kind of shook my head. You know? They don't know. They have no idea. (Brenda, teacher, Babson Elementary)

The resentment toward the district was felt strongly by staff at both schools. From the teachers' perspective the district had abandoned the schools up until the state expressed interest in visiting the school, and then the district administrators seemed to be acting like they were familiar with the school. Ms. Beth and many of the teachers at both schools expressed sorrow that it had to come to early intervention in their school for the district to show any interest in the obvious needs of the school.

At Babson Elementary the Fact Finding Review Report identified a weak administrator and poor teaching as the major problems within the school. The teachers who read the report felt that it was "scathing." Teachers explained the contents of the report.

> I mean they said that we were incompetent teachers. Almost the whole staff, how did they phrase it? Not non-professional, but they really degraded us I thought. It was awful. It was an awful report. It was like, and some of the things that supposedly teachers

> said were like, 'Oh my God.' You don't say things like that in front of [the state]. (Bridget, teacher, Babson Elementary)
>
> I remember reading [the Fact Finding Review Report], and I remember going through. I'm like you know what? This is really taken out of context… They didn't name names. [T]he performance it said was very, very low. I mean they said teacher performance was just inadequate. (Brenda, teacher, Babson Elementary)

The teachers who remained in the school felt shame about the things in the classroom that were reported. Though the report "didn't name names," the teachers felt awful about the results of the report and were embarrassed to be reading it with a new principal who was making judgments about the school and their teaching.

Interestingly, teachers from Alfred Elementary, teachers had a less negative impression of the report.

> We thought [the report] reflected what we all talked to them about. We knew. You know? Everything that they said from the atmosphere, you know to lack of resources. We all knew that and so we felt it really reflected our discussions with the Department of Education. (Anita, teacher, Alfred Elementary)
>
> …[W]hen they did do criticism, it was very truthful. When they said, 'You know what? You have these three things to correct in one year. You need to nail it down…' It wasn't harsh. (Adeline, teacher, Alfred Elementary)

There are a few reasons why the comments and criticism within the report may have been perceived more positively. First, the report did not indict the teaching within the school. Rather, it concentrated on resources and other needs. Second, Alfred Elementary had already been through the PIM process, had a new principal, and a high percentage of staff turnover. It was a new year for the school and many changes had already been implemented. Teachers knew it, and the report reflected it.

Feeling negatively about the Fact Finding Report caused damage to the teachers' view of the DOE. One Babson Teacher reacted to the Fact Finding Report,

> [The DOE staff] are in their little ivory towers. That's how I look at them… My feeling is that they have no idea what goes on. (Bridget, teacher, Babson Elementary)

The teachers felt the criticism was personal, even though they agreed that teachers in some of the classrooms were entirely ineffective. They even seemed to know who the ineffective teachers were, but when it was written in the report, they took personal offense to some of the things that were written about the teachers and felt that some of the criticisms were targeted at themselves.

By the end of the Fact Finding Review, the DOE has shared the in-depth diagnosis (report) with the underperforming school principal and staff. Unfortunately, in a majority of the cases when a school is identified as underperforming, the school principal is removed. In both the Alfred and Babson Elementary Schools the principals were removed prior to attending the PIM. So, while the DOE has created a system built around a collaborative working relationship, the time and energy spent is lost because much the effort is primarily focused on the principal, who is removed by the district superintendent. Essentially, the DOE staff must rebuild the relationship with the new underperforming school principal during the PIM training.

Performance Improvement Mapping (PIM)

Performance Improvement Mapping (PIM) is the state's corrective intervention into the underperforming school. The PIM is DOE's professional development for underperforming school teams, used to analyze the weaknesses and strengths within their

schools using a data driven methodology. During the PIM training, the underperforming school team is empowered to customize improvement efforts for the unique context of their school. No matter how effectively the message that early intervention relies on the work of the underperforming school staff is communicated prior to PIM, the training session serves as the final opportunity for the DOE to clearly articulate this message and for the school to internalize it. The PIM is the catch all for driving that message home for the school team.

The PIM portion of early intervention has several different stages that culminate in a workable school improvement plan to be approved by the Massachusetts Board of Education (BOE). First is the PIM training, which is composed of several facilitated training sessions where the principal and school team members go through a process of looking at their students' MCAS results and making determinations about areas of need. More than data (MCAS) analysis training, it is a model for making decisions about the school based on data, rather than a gut feeling about what is working or not working in a school. Second is the improvement planning the school team does outside of the PIM training. Last is the school team working with the DOE to finalize a school improvement plan that accomplishes the immediate priorities within the school and that is in shape to be reviewed and approved by the BOE. Once a school's plan is approved, the school exits the beginning of intervention and enters into a relationship with the DOE monitors for a period of two years.

Performance Improvement Mapping (PIM) training is provided by the DOE for underperforming school teams comprised of members (teachers) selected by the school principal. The previous points of intervention emphasize the need for the

underperforming school principal and teachers to understand that early intervention is intended to be an enabling system rather than a deterrent one. PIM is the last point of early intervention. The DOE has to make it clear that school improvement is in the hands of the educators in the underperforming school with support from the state. The amount of work the school teams are required to put into the analysis of data and improvement plan makes this clear. This is a remedy for the issue O'Day (2004) identifies: that schools will respond unevenly to state intervention. State level participants recognize that the underperforming school teams are coming from different starting points depending on where they are in the "grief cycle" (Daphne, DOE). Those teams that are at the point of acceptance are able to break through and make changes quicker than those school teams that are still feeling angry about the state designation of underperformance.

The State Level

According to the DOE, the PIM training is professional development and support for the underperforming school teams aimed at providing them with the tools to take improvement into their own hands. Dianne addresses how the PIM training is different than other aspects of early intervention.

> Well, I think that there is quite a burden on the PIM process. …[Y]ou know a lot of what happens in the early stages of that is very difficult for these schools and their teams. They have to break through…a lot of different things that are happening in the school. And, there are…a lot of different dynamics among the staff. …They have to at some point say, 'Look here's where we are. Here's where we have to get, and we have to do that. There's something we're not doing right, or we're not doing well for our kids, and we have to do better.' And that's not an easy thing for most people to come to… You know they start in different places and some of it's really just a question of having a good process for them to work through to get a plan. Others have a lot further to go. So, I think that ownership takes time. I think it starts in the PIM process. (Dianne, DOE)

The "burden" Dianne refers to is that the PIM is when underperforming school teams, no matter where they are starting from, must use the tools they are trained by the DOE to use to plan for their own school improvement. "Ownership takes time," no matter how underperforming school teams enter the PIM training, but by the end, when they are presenting before the state Board of Education, they definitely realize that the state may help them, but they are going to be doing the work.

There are several aspects of the PIM process that contribute to a change in the school team's perception of new school accountability policy as an enabling approach rather than a deterrent one. PIM requires active participation of the school teams and reinforces that it is not about blame; it is about objectively looking at how to make improvements in the school. Dianne discusses how the PIM training and method are designed to objectify things in order to move the underperforming school team forward.

> I think what the PIM process does is it objectifies things a bit because it doesn't say, 'What aren't you doing right?' It says, 'Let's look at this data and let's figure out from this performance from these performance results, what's going on here.' And, it really brings the focus down to on the one hand, down to the data, but on the other hand on a school wide level. So, I think…there really is something that happens with a team that has never really done that – never really investigated the data – that is in a sense, um, empowering and also it doesn't feel like a personal attack on them. (Dianne, DOE)

Equipping the underperforming school teams with the tools to analyze the needs in the school empowers them to make small and big systematic changes. Rather than focusing on personal talent, it makes a team look at what they need to change to make improvements. By providing concrete methods and targets, the underperforming school team is focused and not overwhelmed. Daphne reiterates that point,

> …it's not about blame. It's about: is it not in your curriculum? Is it because your teachers don't feel comfortable teaching it? What is it? Why is that happening? And, when the shift begins to take place away from 'it's not bad teachers' necessarily, it might be a lot of other reasons that you can do something about. And, they begin to build on the understanding that there are things they can do. And, if it is teachers that don't know then we've got to get them the right professional development. (Daphne, DOE)

The "bad teachers" idea is a concept that comes out of the "distrust" of education reform, and new school accountability policy. PIM alters that understanding. For the first time the underperforming school staff are shown what they can do to make changes in the school, so frustration can turn into "empowerment."

Support from the DOE staff and district staff help to move the teams during the PIM training. Daphne describes how the DOE works with and facilitates the PIM training with the underperforming school teams.

> PIM is a facilitated process, so they get help all the way through. We don't do it for them. We do it with them. Our hope is that in addition to the end product, which is a viable school improvement plan, we are building their capacity to understand a process that we are expecting them to continue and get better at. (Daphne, DOE)

The consistent message communicated by the state throughout the process is that the DOE is going to be working with you and that it is going to be a partnership. In the PIM training, the school team can actually see how it can be helped by the DOE and the help is put to the test.

Finally, after what is admittedly a lot of hard work over the summer and the beginning of the school year, the DOE reviews the underperforming plan and begins to prepare them to present it before the state Board of Education (BOE). In yet another example of sincerity, respect, and a desire for cooperative working relationship, the DOE

staff assures the school that they will not go before the BOE until they are ready and have a solid improvement plan in hand. Daphne explains,

> We [DOE] will never say, 'OK, you're scheduled to come to the [BOE] meeting,' and let [the BOE] decide your plan isn't good enough… 'You're only going to go there when we all agree it's strong enough for them to approve.'
>
> [We are] always there with [the underperforming school principal]. So, I make all of the arrangements with them, schedule them on the Board agenda…I work with them on that so they are feeling as prepared as they can. (Daphne, DOE)

The DOE's hand holding of the underperforming school team during the presentation before the BOE, shows the school team the value of having DOE involved, and that the working relationship is a partnership, even if they had not seen it this way before.

Underperforming Schools

Universally within the schools, staff expressed frustration that the PIM process did not leave room to look at the whole school. The "narrow" approach to school improvement planning left out what are significant contributors to their students' performance (e.g., LEP, no parental involvement, poverty). Teachers expressed a feeling that not looking at some of the uncontrollable factors makes it look like they are just not doing their jobs. The new principals within the schools agreed with the frustration. However, they also felt they were responsible for focusing the staff on what they can control within the school and making improvements based on these areas.

The Babson Elementary principal and teachers were in the midst of PIM training during the study. One of the Babson teachers (Bridget) described the PIM as "very long, tedious, and tiring." Principals and teachers in both schools found it to be long and involved. Barbara noted that, "…even though it was long and involved, and we had to

spend the summer doing it. We had to go. It seemed as though, this PIM process is better than the process I went through before [with the district]." Adeline described the long hours and hard work required of her and her school team during the PIM training,

> When we were in PIM, it was a lot to do within the first, I think it was two days. And, yes, we did stay over night but we were working until 9:00, 10:00, 11:00, but then we had to be right back the next morning at 8:00... But, I really thought that it was really informative. ... it's very monotonous. It's very time consuming. (Adeline, teacher, Alfred Elementary)

Principals and teachers find the process to be intense, long, and hard, but in the end, they have a plan that is backed up by data to improve their school. The training equips them with the knowledge and the planning allows them the freedom to build on existing strengths within the school. During the hard work of PIM, it did seem that the school teams began to recognize that they are responsible for their school's improvement and they are empowered and enabled to do take on the responsibility.

Surprisingly, the teachers did not find the DOE to be as much of a support during the PIM training as they found the district/school support specialists to be. Teachers described the role of the DOE during the training as a person who stopped by their team infrequently and either encouraged them or asked them to change direction. The district had a more influential role, with the specialist acting as a facilitator of the school team. The involvement level of the district along with the level of expertise the specialist brought to the team about the process really marks a change in how the school team sees the district.

The last step of the PIM process is to present the school improvement plan they have developed using the tools learned at the PIM training to the state's Board of Education. Principals are the presenters of the plan, and it is the point where they truly

feel responsible for improving their school. Being new to the school, the principal faces many new challenges and starting off one's tenure at a school by presenting before the state Board of Education is a trial by fire. It is rare for a principal to ever present to the BOE, and to be defending a new school (at least to the principal) is without a doubt a situation that feels tense and would make any principal nervous. Mr. Arnold says of the experience:

> It was nerve wracking. You know? You're sitting next to your superintendent, and you're just fielding questions about your plan. I can't remember how long it lasted, but it was just…it wasn't easy. But, they asked what was in your plan, but they just asked general questions as well. That made things easier. You know, one question they asked was about the kind of services that you offer students, did you offer parents, that wasn't in the plan? I just talked about the cultural changes, and you know, appointing me, and you know what a great job the superintendent did in appointing me. (Mr. Arnold, Alfred Elementary)

The presentation before the Board of Education is the point when the DOE administrators felt they provided the most support to the principal of the underperforming school. When asked about supports, Mr. Arnold replied,

> I think Stan [the district school support specialist] was very supportive. …I think the superintendent was kept abreast of what was going on. I don't know if he could speak to what we were doing himself. He could just talk about what he did. You know, change in administration. But, he was there [at the Board of Education meeting] next to me. (Mr. Arnold, Alfred Elementary)

More than the busy superintendent, the specialist really becomes the district and the state at the same time by truly making a strong connection with the underperforming school principal.

Conclusion

The point of view of the state upon the working relationship between the state and the underperforming school is longer term and reveals the evolution of the beginning of intervention. A few things stand out as important facets of the beginning of intervention. First of all, district staff and superintendents are really important to the beginning of intervention. At every turn before any decision was made about a school, the DOE Director contacted the superintendent prior to contacting the school. Though new school accountability policy directly connects the state and the school, Daphne from the DOE had clearly decided to utilize the traditional hierarchy in order to expand their capacity and motivate the district to take on the responsibility of addressing the needs within the underperforming schools within their districts. The school support specialists, who reside within the district and are veterans of the district, are designated to build the district's capacity to provide support to underperforming schools. In the end, the DOE believes its responsibility is to develop a support infrastructure, but it is the districts that must do the work to improve schools.

Second, the removal of principals in the midst of the beginning of intervention can prove to be disruptive to the building of a working relationship between DOE and the underperforming school. The DOE-designed early intervention process has evolved into a design that builds the working relationship with the school by giving DOE liaisons regions, conducting preliminary preparation visits, setting up logistics, and using the liaisons as a point of contact at the state level. All of the interaction occurs primarily between the DOE liaison and the principal. When the principal is removed (by the superintendent) at the end of the school year, and prior to the PIM training, much of the

relationship building is lost. The loss of the principal may contribute to the sense of not knowing the "big picture" among teachers in the school and may partially contribute to the high turnover of the staff.

Although using the principal as the DOE's primary contact causes a disruption in the development of the working relationship because in a majority of the cases the principal is removed, the PIM serves as an opportunity for the DOE to connect with the new principal and school team. The connection is supportive to the school, and it allows the school principal and teachers to strengthen their relationship with district administrators (specialists). The PIM is the catchall point where the DOE delivers the message to school teams that it is the principal and the teachers within the school who will plan and successfully implement improvement strategies. The schools have been declared underperforming, but the team is empowered to make their own improvements to the school, under the guidance of the DOE. Empowerment removes any notion of a deterrent understanding of new school accountability that the school staff members may have had.

Third, the environment that the DOE Director has developed is one that is supportive of schools but balanced with being firm about improvement that needs to take place within the schools. Over and over throughout the interviews, it is clear that the state level participants believe schools can improve and do improve. I say this because there are some who believe the intent of new school accountability policy undermines the public education system in and of itself. I do not disagree that there are people who would like alternatives to the existing system, but I did not find those people or beliefs among those who participated in the study. Every effort, whether it be selecting a

contractor that places personal relationships as a top priority or selecting liaisons that have an understanding of the school because they have worked in schools, was made to strengthen the connection between the underperforming school and the DOE within the organizational capacity limitations.

Fourth, expanding capacity drives the implementation process, and rather than try and do it all, the DOE has decided to address a smaller number of underperforming schools relatively well. Using a district relationship to share information about the state strategies, the implicit hope is that the districts will take on the other underperforming schools before the DOE has to visit them. Another way the state manages its capacity limitations is relying on the "right people." The staff, practitioners, and contractors all reported that they had worked with really talented people who were able to balance the role of evaluator with supporter of the underperforming schools. Though anecdotally there were a few stories of personality clashes between the state team and the school staff, for the most part the level of skill and expertise the state level people brought with them made for a smoother process that increased the likelihood of a cooperative working relationship between the state and the school.

Fifth, the DOE has a respect for the different places and contexts an underperforming school may be coming from or living within. Rather than try to impose a one size fits all early intervention process upon the underperforming schools, the DOE designed a uniform protocol and process with built in flexibility to accommodate the needs of a particular school. Because of the uniqueness of each underperforming school, it is difficult to typify the working relationship between the DOE and the school during the selected points during the early intervention process.

In the end, it is apparent that the involvement level between the DOE and the underperforming school has increased. From the perspective of those in the underperforming school, the relationship between the underperforming school and the DOE changes over the course of early intervention, although throughout, the expectations the school participants had for the DOE staff were low. Involvement between the two naturally increases through the early intervention process. When you are coming from virtually no involvement to even a little involvement, it has to go up. I have to doubt that at any point the underperforming school feels the involvement level of the DOE is high because it seems they rely on the district for every day involvement with the underperforming school.

As far as the trust level, the sincerely supportive nature of the DOE during the beginning of intervention is communicated to the underperforming principal and staff over a period of months of early intervention and by the time they are presenting before the Board of Education has likely reached its peak. I would have to conclude that the working relationship is a moving target between "coming apart with avoidance" and residing closer to "cooperative but autonomous." The working relationship between the school and the DOE improves or begins during early intervention, but it never gets to "pulling together and synergistic" (Scheberle, 1997). Mr. Arnold describes a working relationship that sounds more like a "cooperative but autonomous" (Scheberle, 1997) relationship.

> Only with the DOE [liaison]– I'd call him if we had some issues with the report, or we needed information, and [the state] came down for a visit, and we would email each other and say, 'This is accurate. This isn't accurate.' Before he would write the report, he would have me look it over and say, 'Any factual things that I

need to change here?' So, that's what we'd do along those lines, but no, I wouldn't call him. (Mr. Arnold, Alfred Elementary)

Evidently there is a level of trust and comfort, but Mr. Anthony does not feel comfortable calling him for a question or support, for that sort of thing he relies on the district.

I believe that ideally, the DOE would likely want a "cooperative but autonomous" relationship with the underperforming school. At first this seems wrong. Why not have high levels of trust and involvement? The truth is the DOE does not have the resources or capacity to achieve any more than a low level of involvement with the school. Consequently they leave the "pulling together and synergistic" type of working relationship to the traditional (local) partners in the public education system: the district and the school.

This brings us to the last facet of working relationships during new school accountability policy implementation. It is clear throughout all of the state level interviews that in the face of early intervention, the district is ultimately responsible for improving the delivery of education within an underperforming school. After reviewing the interviews, one of the implicit goals of early intervention emerged. It is to improve the working relationship between the district and the underperforming school. The staff members of the DOE do not want the most effective working relationship between themselves (DOE) and the underperforming school.

The DOE wants to reinvigorate or rehabilitate the working relationship between the district and the underperforming school. The district and school should have high levels of involvement, and more than likely do have increased levels of involvement with the institution of the school support specialist strategy. Trust may prove to be a challenge because they do work closely with one another and certainly do have a past that at least

from the perspective of those in the school that is neglectful. Once again the supportive nature of the specialists is a strategy that can improve and rehabilitate levels of trust and set the district and the school on their way to a "pulling together and synergistic" working relationship.

The real relationship story is the dramatic change that occurs in how the school principal and teachers feel about the district administrators. In both schools the schoolteachers felt the relationship between the school and the district was marked by little to no level of involvement and extremely low levels of trust. Scheberle (1997) calls this "coming apart with avoidance" and finds the relationship to be shallow and full of misunderstanding and misperception of one another.

The PIM training is a new beginning for schools and their districts. It becomes the arena for the new principal to learn about the school he or she will be running and to meet the team of teachers from the school. Also, the principal has an opportunity in a smaller planning team to set his or her agenda through improvement planning. It serves as an opportunity for the principal to develop a positive working relationship with the district (school support specialist), and it allows the teachers on the team to rethink their negative feelings toward the district. Through small acts of support, guidance and sharing of expertise the district specialist has a chance to chip away at the old idea of how the district and school working relationship once was and to start anew. Though the relationship remains tenuous, with the help of the specialist, it hovers closer to a "pulling together and synergistic" type of relationship characterized by a mutual understanding between the two organizations toward reaching a common goal of school improvement.

CHAPTER VIII

THE "FIXER" DISTRICT

Bardach (1977) first identified the "fixer" role in policy implementation and describes it as a policymaker who oversees, monitors, and cares about how a policy is implemented, and thus is there throughout the cycle of implementation to make adjustments so that the policy's end goals are achieved. Lin (2000) takes a slightly different approach to the idea by delegating the "fixer" role to any entity that is negotiating and fitting the policy into the context of the organization. The "fixer" is anyone, a policymaker or a person implementing the policy who has the power and influence to negotiate implementation. Early intervention in Massachusetts places the "fixer" role at the district level and with the addition of school support specialists located at the large urban districts, they are wholly secured as the negotiators of policy.

The school support specialists' role in new school accountability policy implementation is not easily categorized as "state" or "local." The position is funded by the state. However, the specialist is required to have experience working in the district. Specialists work in the superintendent's office, and in the eyes of colleagues and other educators in the district the specialists are employed by the district, not the DOE. With the exception of regular meetings and trainings with DOE administrators, and the fact that DOE has final approval on who is hired to work as a school support specialist, many

of the decisions about the work of the specialists are made by the superintendent. The sense from the DOE is that the superintendent is the best judge of how the specialists' time is best allotted, as long is it is used on school improvement initiatives. Without a doubt, the school support specialists are a strong connection between the underperforming school, the district, and the DOE. However, because they reside at the district, are from the district, and for the most part are perceived as district administrators, it is most appropriate to think about them as coming from the local or district level.

Specialists are working and meeting with the DOE regularly to continuously refine the policy and ensure a common understanding of the outcomes, and they are working with the underperforming schools to accommodate their unique challenges and contexts and helping principal makes sense of the early intervention strategies for his or her particular underperforming school. The district and especially the school support specialists are designed to be the middlemen during the implementation of new school accountability policy.

Working Relationship between the District and the DOE

The selected points in time during the beginning of intervention for examining working relationships are less relevant to the district and DOE relationship because the relationship timeframe is greater than a single underperforming school review cycle. The working relationship variables of trust and involvement, however, are relevant and generally applied to the working relationship.

The strength of the relationship between the DOE and the district is a surprising finding in the study because new school accountability policy skips the district and

connects the school and the DOE directly and because of the past relationship between the district and DOE. Stan explains the past relationship,

> I think historically [there was] almost no relationship. Sort of like the giant elephant in the room is DOE, but you don't have to look at them or talk to them, unless you have to talk to them. (Stan, Charlesburg District)

According to Stan, people in the district did not call the DOE unless it was a last resort. They believed it was better to try and deal with things on their own rather than bring in the DOE, which would inevitably make a bigger deal out of an issue than necessary. Bringing in the DOE did not mean state support would be coming to the district. Rather, it meant more scrutiny and more work for the district to comply with state demands. The incentive to work with DOE did not exist. Rooted in the old culture of SDE's that focused on inputs and enforcing compliance, it is not surprising that district administrators did not want the state to make them jump through extra hoops or go through a detailed compliance review. No contact from the DOE was considered good news to those in the district, and the idea of bringing the DOE into the district was viewed as absurd.

If you take a step back from knowing how a district feels about the compliance and administratively driven DOE, the organization of state public education systems in and of itself should make a partnership between the DOE and the district natural and automatic. The organization of the public education system is such that the DOE is the organizer and data gatherer at the top, and the districts oversee the schools in the actual delivery of education. State reliance upon the district to improve schools is natural within the existing context of state public education systems, because the educational knowledge and expertise resides at the district and school levels. It is also natural for the

district to play the role of supporting and implementing the mandates of the state into the school because the district is closer to the underperforming schools. However from Stan's assessment, it is clear that the "natural" assumption that the DOE and district would work together is not necessarily true.

Logically it makes sense for the DOE to work with the district to support underperforming schools when considering the organization of the public education system. The DOE has had to make an effort to create a partnership with the district as it implements new school accountability policy. As the more dependent party, the DOE, started off by making a few "magnanimous gestures" (Weber, Malhotra, & Murnighan, 2003) toward the district. The include consulting with the district superintendent about the potentially underperforming schools within his or her district and providing targeted funding for school support specialist who are from and reside within the district. These have led to an improved relationship between the two.

Specifically, the new working relationship between the DOE and the district has been evolving since the interventions commenced in 2000. The first gesture was when the DOE began holding regular meetings between the urban district superintendents and the associate commissioner of Accountability and Technical Assistance at the DOE. The regular meetings are ongoing and have contributed to the evolution of how new school accountability policy is implemented in Massachusetts. The school support specialist strategy is one of the most influential components of implementation, and is a DOE innovation, but certainly sprang out of a need identified during the regular meetings with superintendents.

The second gesture was the decision for the school support specialists to be a respected veteran of the district where the underperforming schools they are supposed to help are located. Rather than having the schools look at the specialist as a "carpetbagger" (Stan, Charlesburg District), the DOE's support of allowing experienced district level people to in turn provide support for their schools showed respect for the district and the importance of educational context in which each of the underperforming schools functions. As Stan states,

> What [DOE] could do is…grab some people, call them school support people, and put then in your urban centers. And, what DOE… decided to do is… go to Charlesburg, and [other Massachusetts urban districts]… and all those different places, and we're going to find people, and ask the superintendent who might be the best at doing this job and then hire them there. I think that was a stroke of genius by Massachusetts. (Stan, Charlesburg District)

The DOE gathers the School Support Specialists together on a regular basis to work as partners, provide training, and hammer out the early intervention process with one another. Allowing the districts (through urban superintendent and school support specialist meetings) a forum to discuss the challenges of early intervention and to develop a place for two-way, informal communication makes district administrators feel supported and connected to the process. Rather than having early intervention be something that is done to the district and the underperforming school, it is a partnership or collaboration in which both want to achieve the common goal of improving educational outcomes in the schools. The regular meetings have "opened the door" (Sandy, Charlesburg District) between the district and the DOE and are the place where trust, sincerity, and reciprocity between the two occurs. The gesture naturally allows for the relationship to strengthen.

Both school support specialists sincerely felt supported by the DOE in their efforts to improve the schools within the Charlesburg district. Fully integrated into the district, the school support specialists began to disseminate their newly gained expertise by working with all the district's schools and by training them in a PIM style school improvement planning process. The school support specialists have a priority to work with the state declared underperforming schools, then the schools not visited by the state but designated in need of improvement by NCLB standards, and then the remaining schools within the district. Stan describes his experience as a school support specialist as "the best group of professionals I have ever been associated with."

The working relationship between the district and the DOE has improved as a result of the school support specialist strategy. The district specialists are critical players in connecting with the DOE, playing the role of fixer between the DOE, the district, and the underperforming school. The specialists facilitate and smooth out the process of understanding new school accountability policy and implementing the policy.

The relationship between the DOE and district has changed since the beginning of intervention of new school accountability policy was implemented in 2000. Prior to implementation, the relationship between the DOE and the district was marked by low levels of trust and involvement and can be described as "coming apart with avoidance" (Scheberle, 1997). Often found in loosely coupled systems, Stan states that there was virtually "no relationship" prior to new school accountability policy.

Changes to the relationship occurred when the DOE made gestures to the district about wanting to partner to improve public education in their districts. Sandy explains, "[DOE staff] have tried to team with us." Involvement and a sense of partnership have

increased through regular meetings with superintendents and the DOE. The school support specialist strategy enhanced the involvement levels between the state and the district and increased the levels of trust that the district had for the DOE because the strategy was aimed at achieving a common goal of improving the schools within their districts.

The state level administrators have shown their willingness to negotiate policy implementation aimed at the common end goal throughout the process. Sandy discusses one of the ways in which DOE negotiates with the district. "They try to work with us to streamline [early intervention] to make it better each and every year, to be clear about the communications about what the steps are along the way" (Sandy, Charlesburg District).

Sincere acts of support and regular and clear communication have altered the working relationship between the DOE and the urban district so that it comes closer to a "pulling together and synergistic" type of relationship. The school support specialists perceive the working relationship, by no means perfect, as characterized by regular two way communication, a sincere understanding of the "human element" during early intervention, a mutual respect for the strengths and expertise each possess, and an understanding of the unique context in which each school and district operates. The type of relationship DOE has developed with the district allows for negotiation of the policy during implementation and ensures that the specialists will keep the policy relevant for the district through regular feedback to the DOE and making regular judgments about changes within the underperforming schools.

Working Relationship between the District and the School

In the past the school district superintendent and administrators treated schools as separate and independent entities that could "sink or swim" (Stan, Charlesburg District) on their own. The attitude was such that, if the district administrators told the school what needed to be done, in minds of the district administrators it was done. District administrators rarely if ever checked on schools to find out whether it actually was implemented or if it was not implemented. It was left up to those in the school to seek support from the district and when support was sought, those in the school need to be ready and willing to be the recipients of whatever support the district provided. Not accessing resources or talking to the district was a school's problem and not that of anyone in the district. Sandy discusses how the relationship (or lack of relationship) worked:

> You could have interviewed a school that had [poor test scores] and as long as the lid was on, and things were quiet and things were safe and there was nobody complaining, you weren't going to be looked at closely. (Sandy, Charlesburg District)

Basically, unless a school principal was asking for help or a parent was complaining or the local school committee had an issue with a school, students' performance could be devastatingly low, and the district would still not be involved with the school. New school accountability policy impels the district to take an active role in the underperforming school. Additionally NCLB subgroup analysis of English language learners, special education students and students by race have forced the district to look at schools and the subgroups "in a real close way" (Sandy, Charlesburg District).

Now, the district uses the state's underperforming designations and NCLB designations to prioritize their interventions and connections with the schools. The

school support specialists are critical to altering the relationship from leaving the school alone to coming in with support during the early intervention cycle. By requiring every school in the district, regardless of performance status, to attend training and develop a PIM-style school improvement plan, the specialists have established themselves as knowledgeable experts in what the DOE is looking for in the even the school is chosen for a state visit. When a school is identified for a visit, the specialist makes contact with the principal and works closely with him or her to prepare for the visit and review the school improvement plan. Additionally specialists attend school faculty meetings to explain the process and provide feedback to plans.

School support specialists specials work with the schools to "make sense" of early intervention. Sandy discusses the reaction of the school toward the district school support specialists.

> Generally speaking, they're happy to have us because they recognize that we're bringing support, and we keep trying to make sure that every time we're there that we leave a document trail that helps them… (Sandy, Charlesburg District)

District school support specialists approach their work with the underperforming schools with balance and focus. They feel empathy and provide support for all of the diverging issues a principal is faces in an underperforming school while they hold the school principals and staff accountable for decisions they make. The "art" of balancing support and accountability is a common theme in the stories specialists tell about going into schools. Sandy explains, "I'm working with a principal one day on their providing help and the next day I'm pushing on something." Stan talks about the "human aspect."

> You have to understand the human aspect of what you're doing. And, if you are talking to a principal who is so stressed at this moment that nothing is getting through, don't even bother talking

> to her. Reschedule and go at another time. I mean that's the part of what we're doing. We have to be aware of just how much stress everyone is under. (Stan, Charlesburg District)

Professional judgment of the specialists is critical to accomplishing school improvement. Specialists have to work with the principals and teachers of underperforming schools to wait for the teachable moments and to fit the demands of accountability so that they make sense within the immediate context of the school and the needs of the school staff. Sometimes this means the specialists must wait for the time when the school staff can handle critiques and proactively make decisions to remedy problems. The specialists are not interested in decimating the public education system or those within it. They are trying to improve it, and keep the schools on track to improve students educational outcomes.

The specialists work with the school principal during each step of early intervention. As soon a school is identified for a School Panel Review visit, the specialist contacts the school and tries to turn the "devastation" of the principal into action. The specialist gives the principal the big picture and points to the areas where the state will question the principal and staff. Specialists feel that when the state asks the exact questions they gave the principal in advance, they gain credibility and the principal and teachers are then much more willing to listen to them. According to the specialists, the school principals and teachers experience a wide range of emotions during the various stages of the process ranging from anger, to self-blame, to not feeling good enough. Working with principals and teachers to transform what feels bad into a positive opportunity is a priority for the specialists. They are vital in changing the school

principal and teachers' perceptions of early intervention as a deterrent system to one that is enabling.

Increased involvement and support by the specialists toward the school change the relationship between the district and the school. In the past schools were left on their own to "sink or swim," and were expected to comply with directives from the district given without support. The relationship was antagonistic and isolating for the school. Salary issues and a general lack of support have contributed to lower levels of trust between the schools and the district and make the relationship of the past closest to "coming apart with avoidance"(Scheberle, 1997). A relationship marked by distrust and isolation between the two entities.

Since the school support specialists have come on board, the relationship they aspire to with underperforming schools is a "pulling together and synergistic" relationship, which has high levels of trust and involvement. As the district and school move toward that ideal, they move through a "coming apart and contentious" working relationship which has low levels of trust and high involvement levels. The specialists must work through the remnants of low levels of trust within the school by acts of sincerity and support. They accomplish this by sharing expertise and working more closely with the school to reinforce data driven decision making and improvement strategies. Most importantly, the specialists make the underperforming school a district priority, a new and different experience for those in the school who found the district to be neglectful and unsupportive for many years prior to intervention. The specialists strategy to balance the support and accountability is a strategy to improve the levels of trust between the school and the district.

Conclusion

"Schools don't exist on their own… anymore at all under [new school accountability]… So, much more than ever before, we're tied in" (Stan, Charlesburg District). The school support specialist is discussing one of the major outcomes of new school accountability policy. The loosely coupled public education system is starting to become a system that has specific roles and responsibilities assigned to the school, district, or state levels.

Most people may have assumed that these were the roles at the various levels of the public education system; however, that is not how they were functioning. The starting point of the working relationships between the district and the DOE and the district and the school are evidence of the isolation of each level of the state's public education system. New school accountability policy has motivated each level of the public education system to take on the responsibility for educational outcomes. By "opening doors" between all of the levels, there is more two-way communication between the levels. The district is critical, because it is in the middle of the communication lines.

The district school support specialists are the negotiators of policy at the school level. They know the district, and they have a working relationship with the DOE. They are in regular communication with the state and the school, and therefore must fit the end goal of new school accountability policy within the district and specific underperforming school. Balancing support and accountability when working with school principals and staff is a significant part of their job. Once again having the "right people" to balance

these roles and to feel comfortable working with all levels of the public education system is vital to the successful implementation of new school accountability and early intervention.

CHAPTER IX

DISCUSSION/CONCLUSION

Stone (1997) writes, "...the political analyst who wants to choose a wise course of action should focus less on assessing the objective consequences of actions and more on how the interpretations will go" (p. 8). Altering how we look at a policy, Stone (1997) shows how policy is perceived is often more important than its actual objectives. This is true for new school accountability policy on a number of levels. The perception of new school accountability is initially threatening to those in the school and according to DOE professionals, and it is at least partially intended to be threatening and motivating for educators within the schools. It is, however, most threatening to those who reside at the district level. Without explicitly pushing or even intervening in a district, it pushes superintendents and district administrators to realign resources and attention to underperforming schools that have been, dare I say, systematically ignored for years even before school accountability measures were in place.

In both schools, when participants were questioned about whether these changes in leadership, as well as in the classroom, would have occurred without school accountability, the answer was no, with a caveat. Educators in both schools recognized problems within the school, and seemed to have an understanding of what it would take to improve. However, the changes that required a district response were either slow in coming or unlikely to occur because of issues that were beyond the control of the

educators within the schools. Principals and teachers believed the district may have made changes eventually, but felt as though their schools were languishing as they waited for the changes to be made. Once the caveat that the district might have eventually made changes to better the school was put out into the open, there was general agreement that the speed and number of changes would not have occurred unless new school accountability policy existed. The principals and teachers believed that the state's decision to intervene in the school and triggered a new level of support and attention from the district.

This is an interesting proposition. From the outside it appears that new school accountability policy will solely impact the school. Because new school accountability in Massachusetts is part of comprehensive reform legislation, the school accountability system is part of a larger statewide accountability system that includes holding districts accountable. For the underperforming schools the threat of state intervention is over at the point of early intervention, and the DOE works to transform the perceptions those in the underperforming school have about the policy. The transformation is intended change the local understanding of the policy as an enabling system in which the DOE and the school to engage in a working relationship that is at best "cooperative but autonomous."

Once intervention begins, policy has a less deterrent effect on the school. However, the district, still under the threat of the state's district accountability system, is still motivated by the policy's deterrent nature. The threat to the district, combined with the supplemental resources provided by the DOE in the form of school support specialists, provides the district superintendent with the targeted resources to work with

the underperforming schools in partnership with the DOE. The results of early intervention are in fact changes that come from the district level: selecting a new principal as leader, making new resources available, and developing district-wide school improvement programs and technical assistance aligned with the type of support provided by the DOE to underperforming schools.

"Locating authority in many small jurisdictions leads to domination by local elites, policies that maintain the status quo, enactment of racial and other prejudices, and little or no redistribution of either power or wealth" (Stone, 1997, p. 366). The domination of local authorities over schools in which resources are not equally, adequately, or appropriately allocated to schools is the underlying reason for adding an external accountability system to the public education system. The tension between local school (and district) internal and state's external accountability is the environment in which new school accountability policy is negotiated.

Early intervention throws in a dash or more of external accountability into the context so that new school accountability in fact changes the recipe within the public education system and motivates changes in the distribution of resources towards schools that are underperforming. Within the tension between internal and external accountability systems lie many truths. It is true that the internal accountability system is lodged in the idea of decentralized government emphasizing customization of the resources to meet the needs at the client level. It is also true that an external accountability system is found within the idea of a more centralized government, which relies on the expertise of those far from the client, who are less likely to be prejudiced by local connections and politics. Therefore, external accountability is universally applied,

and helps to identify those areas that are either being underserved by or in need of more resources, attention, training, etc. Rather than moving from the pole of internal accountability to external accountability, Massachusetts new school accountability policy during early intervention changes the tension, without eliminating either.

Negotiation of early intervention is about communicating the need for both an external and internal accountability system rather than eliminating one (external) for the other (internal). Having both has the potential to create balance. In a critique of new school accountability policy, O'Day (2004) states that one of the biggest problems with new school accountability policy is that it increases the bureaucratic control over the loosely coupled public education system, making those at the bottom, the principals and teachers less likely to take risks and develop an "adaptive learning system" (p. 32).

Interviews with school level participants did not entirely support the notion that principals and teachers in underperforming schools felt early intervention would limit their ability. Rather, underperforming school principals and, more so, teachers believed that they needed more involvement of the district. Those in the school often welcomed state intervention in the hope that their voices and their professional insights about the problems within the school would be heard by the district.

The capacity in the underperforming schools was not conducive to "adaptive learning systems" because of the problems within the schools. The teachers in the underperforming schools were trying to get by each day, and do the best job they could with the limited resources of text books, supplies, technology and appropriate learning services for students. By all accounts, teachers wanted the DOE to come in and see what they deal with on a daily basis, and they believed that the state involvement might just

garner the attention of the district, which each principal and teacher in each underperforming school characterized as neglectful at best prior to early intervention.

Much like a guitar being tuned, you need the bridge and the tuning peg connecting the guitar string to be able to play. Without the poles of internal and external accountability, the education system does not function. The idea is supported by O'Day's (2002) assertion that a school cannot have state external accountability at the cost of its own internal accountability system. Instead of all or nothing, new school accountability policy is an attempt to retune a school and a district by adjusting the distribution of resources (encompassed by funds, training, district attention, principals, and teachers) to the school. Early intervention is an effort to strike a balance between the local authority and the adequate distribution of resources within the DOE's early intervention framework.

One Best Framework

Each DOE participant emphasized the important role of the district during the implementation of new school accountability policy. At first it was difficult to distinguish where the DOE or the district responsibility for improving the delivery of education in underperforming schools began and ended. Debra clarified the roles:

> There's a huge need for us to be helping low performing schools, and in fact, the responsibility is on the state to develop an infrastructure – a statewide infrastructure of support. NCLB requires us to do that. So, we knew that…, it made more sense for us as a state to build capacity at the school district level rather than for us to have any relationship between the state and the school and bypass the school district. (Debra, DOE)

The state develops the framework and the district is responsible for ensuring school improvement.

Part of early intervention for the DOE is to strengthen and clarify the roles of educators at every level of the public education system. In the loosely coupled system the roles and responsibilities were not as clearly defined in the past, and the expectation was that when a directive was sent out from the DOE, the district or school complied (similar to the expectations between the district and the school). If a problem arose and was brought to the DOE's attention, then a district or school risked being exposed to the scrutiny of a state compliance review. Now, the role of the DOE is to develop the framework in which the expectation is that policy implementation must be negotiated and fitted to the local context. The role of the district is to be responsible for school improvement and the role of the school is to use the frameworks and resources in the district to improve educational outcomes. Even though they did not have to by law, the DOE staff incorporated the district because they had a pre-existing relationship with the state and with the school. As Debra explains,

> The districts are there to stay.... [I]t is their job both under NCLB and state requirements to make sure that their schools are providing appropriate instruction for their kids. So, we really wanted to make sure that they...took on this responsibility...(Debra, DOE)

At first it is surprising that all of the responsibility for school improvement is the district's responsibility. What about new school accountability policy and the state and underperforming schools' direct connection? What about the state's constitutional responsibility to provide an adequate education to children within the state? During early intervention the responsibility, in the eyes of the DOE, remains in the hands of the

districts. Early intervention is only a mild intervention in which the local control is not taken away, but threatened with future interventions. By clearly holding the district responsible the DOE is fitting the policy, which some could argue places the responsibility in the hands of the state (DOE), into the existing organization of the public education system and may be attempting to strengthen the district and school relationship with the additional support of the district specialists.

Rather than imposing one best system upon the schools that are underperforming, the DOE has developed a strategy that takes into account the unique local context. By allowing the district and the school to develop a strong working relationship ideally approaching "pulling together and synergistic," the DOE administrators are allowing the two to "make sense" of new school accountability policy within the district's and school's unique, local context. In other words, the DOE has developed "one best framework" for early implementation that aims to enhance the roles of the district and the school through in-depth diagnosis (Fact-Finding Review), professional development (PIM), targeted resources (school support specialists) and continuing involvement (DOE liaison).

Another interesting facet of the DOE's relationship with the district is that in Massachusetts there is also a district accountability policy. The responsibility for district accountability resides outside of the DOE, but similar to new school accountability policy, district accountability is primarily focused on educational outcomes. So, while the school may have been declared underperforming and losing the "threat" of the deterrent policy, the district is still being threatened by a similar district based accountability policy. It is in the best interest of district superintendents to work with the

DOE to improve the district's underperforming schools because it directly impacts the determination about whether the district needs to be taken over by the state. The motivation for reinvigorated relationships between the DOE and the district and between the district and the underperforming schools, therefore, is at least partially driven by the deterrent district accountability policy that threatens each time a school within the district is declared underperforming.

During early intervention, it is easy to understand why the DOE focuses on the district as the unit responsible for the improving the underperforming schools because the district is still being held accountable by the state. In the context of district incentives to improve schools and cooperate with the state, the DOE staff must redefine their relationship with the district. Conveniently, the DOE is able to expand capacity through new relations with urban district superintendents and has helped the districts in their time of need by providing them with a designated person or persons to focus entirely on school improvement efforts, and consequently expanding the district's capacity to improve.

New school accountability policy is based on the premise that schools are the unit of change. Consequently, "[M]uch of the basic research on characteristics of effective schools ignored the role of the district or identified districts as partly to blame for allowing ineffective schools to exist…" (Anderson, 2003, p. 1) Thus, in many states, like Massachusetts with "first generation accountability systems[1]" (Mintrop & Trujillo, 2004, p. 1), having the district play such an active role in the implementation of new school accountability policy implementation and partnering between the SDE and the district is

[1] First generation accountability systems are those in which states had pre-existing accountability systems before the passage of NCLB in 2001.

unusual (Bowles, et. al., 2002; Mintrop & Trujillo, 2004). The original idea behind school accountability policy was to skip over the district and directly connect the school with the state. However, the Massachusetts DOE's efforts to have the district become such an active partner during early intervention have served the DOE well. First, it expands the limited capacity at the state level. Second, it improves DOE's relationship with the district, which improves the chances for best practices and improvement efforts to be disseminated among schools district wide. Third, it gives the district additional capacity during their time of need and while still under the threat of the state's deterrent district accountability policy. Fourth, it forces the district and underperforming school to partner and cooperate in a new way by modeling a supportive, respectful and accountable process of intervention and partnership. Regardless, the DOE participants declared the relationship with the district to be one of the most significant factors in forging a positive working relationship with a school. As Debra describes it,

> It is about respecting each other's vantage point, listening, hearing… hearing what's working and what's not working and trying to adapt and adjust the way you work together to make sure it actually accomplishes what you're trying to accomplish. And, I think because we meet all of the time, because we have open relationships with them, we can accomplish a whole lot more. (Debra, DOE)

Because of the "open relationship" Debra speaks of, most of the negotiation of the implementation of new school accountability policy occurs between the DOE and the district. Negotiation between the state and the district is engrained in the early intervention process. A formal example of the state and district negotiation is described by Daphne,

> First I make calls to the superintendents… Now, what we typically do is, in the conversation with the superintendent, I will say, for

> example, in Charlesburg, we picked six schools there to visit. When I talk to the superintendent, I say, 'Here are the six schools we are going to visit. What do you think about this list? Do you think there is a school or two on this list who would not benefit from having a School Panel Review?'
>
> Often superintendents will say to me, 'I think you should definitely go to this school. They need a wake up call," or, 'The principal is working really hard. The staff is not on board with really supporting improvement work in this school. They need a visit.' Or, 'I've been working with this school for a while, the principal I really don't think is cutting it. Definitely go for a visit.' Or, they'll say, 'You know what? I just put a new principal in that school… he's made some inroads with the staff. They're working well. I think a panel review would be really disruptive.' (Daphne, DOE)

Prior to the any underperforming school visit Daphne consults with the superintendent of the district in which the school resides. The superintendent is given professional respect and courtesy by Daphne by giving the superintendent discretion about which schools are visited within his or her district.

The DOE participants characterize the state's relationship with the district as a positive one. It certainly has been influenced and developed over many years of new school accountability implementation. Christie described the changes since the early years of new school accountability policy and said that the district should be a "hand in hand partner" during early intervention. She went on to say,

> In fact… [i]n the past the principal was hung out to dry [by the district] [T]he principal was considered fully and totally responsible for any… gain or failure that came across in their time in office. So, that was the original belief. And, more so, and I believe this is probably due to [the Accountability and Targeted Assistance Associate Commissioner's] influence, the districts are being held to a much higher standard of support for their schools. They're being held accountable too. So, we've seen in the more recent years a greater involvement of the district staff in support of the schools. (Christie, ABC Consulting)

Christie provides evidence that the relationship between the state and the district has changed and led to a rehabilitation of the relationship between the school and the district. Over the years of new school accountability policy the role of the district has been defined and clarified and the "greater involvement" of the district is a result of the change in the state and district relationship, leading to a change in the relationship between the district and the underperforming school.

Regular superintendent meetings and the bridge of the school support specialists provide a forum for the district and the state to hash out new school accountability implementation issues. The formal and informal feedback mechanism created by regular contact between the two has in the eyes of the DOE staff allowed them to clarify misunderstandings quickly and informally, and accommodate the unique context in which new school accountability policy is being implemented.

Put simply, the district superintendents and school support specialists have informed the DOE's "one best framework" and continue to add to the refinement of the framework as the partners who are responsible for school improvement they in turn have received support, cooperation and respect from the state. The new working relationship between the state and the district is the medium for redefining the state-local relationship to be less focused on compliance and top down mandates and more focused on mutual problem solving and support toward a common goal of improving the delivery of education within the state.

Results of the Beginning of Intervention

In both schools there are short-term results of early intervention and new school accountability policy. The teachers (and new principals) do agree on one thing. The district would have never put in a new, effective principal in the schools had they not been identified as underperforming by the state. Also, the restructuring and positive administrative things that are going on in the school would not have occurred. In many ways these schools had been neglected by the district for years (over five years in each school according to teachers). Without state intervention, change appeared unlikely, and the teachers seem to recognize this. For this the teachers expressed gratefulness for the state intervention.

Changes in the relationship between the district and the school and the support from the state helped to build morale within the school. Inside the schools major changes occurred with the primary and most influential facet of schools: the human factor. Each school had new and seemingly better respected (by the teachers) principals along with a major turnover in the teaching staff.

When teachers were asked to compare the current situation within their schools versus when they were declared underperforming, they found it difficult because these staffing changes made it an entirely different school. All reported improvement in morale and indicated feeling of being empowered to make change. The Alfred Elementary principal and teachers had made some gains and were certainly more positive than the principal and teachers at Babson Elementary, who were still in the thick of

completing their PIM (school improvement) plan. More than anything I attribute the difference to the point in early intervention that they were facing.

Clearly one of the fundamental changes that occurred in the schools as a result of new school accountability policy is the additional attention they receive from the district. In each school, teachers claimed that the troubles the school faced had been going on for five or more years with no intervention by the district. The schools' principals and faculties reported little to no district help occurring prior to the schools' being declared underperforming. Barbara describes what was going on before state intervention,

> I think it's about time. For years…everybody did their own thing, unless you had a very strong leader in the school. I've been in several schools where teachers have just…done their own thing and very little teaching was done and kids didn't do well, and it was just terrible. (Barbara, Babson Elementary)

There was little connection between teachers in the schools and even less between the school and the district. Adeline believes that state intervention led to an improvement in the relationship between the school and the district.

> Well, I think [our relationship with the district] definitely has [changed]. [The district administrators]…see Mr. Arnold as the best thing in the world because we've come so far in just a year. And I think they realize that we really…weren't lying when we went down [to the district] and …submitted complaints. …I think they feel better about us. (Adeline, Alfred Elementary)

Adeline's comment about the district believing the teachers were "lying" about the troubles the school was facing prior to intervention reveals the type of relationship the district and the school had in the past. Teachers at Alfred Elementary took the risky step of going over their former principal's head and complaining at the district level. The complaints were met with no response from the district, making the teachers feel like the school was being neglected. State intervention, which resulted in a change in the

principal and the addition of school support specialists to work with the underperforming school, has contributed to improvements in the dynamic between the school and the district.

The schools and district communicate primarily through the school support specialist and the principals. Consequently, many of the teachers had a sense that there was a change in the relationship because they saw "district people" in the school with much more frequency, and they heard about it from their principal. District support is mainly focused on the principal. Mr. Arnold discusses the role of the district school support specialist and how he could depend on him for support.

> So, [the school support specialist] is the one I can talk to, not only about the school improvement process, but he also has a history. He was also around during the Panel Review [Mr. Arnold was not principal then], and the school Fact Finding as well as the presentation to the Board of Education. So, he's seen full circle. And, he's the one who I could really lean on because he knew what was going on under the previous administration. He knew what I was trying to do here and the success we've had of moving our plan forward. (Mr. Arnold, Alfred Elementary)

The school support specialist provides valuable assistance to the principal and is the primary contact between the school, district, and state.

Since the school support specialist is the primary conduit of communication for the school, a couple of issues or questions arise. First, prior to the inception of the school support specialist position at the district level, how did the district communicate with the schools? Teachers felt that the district simply was not present in their school even when complaints were filed.

Second, in both instances the former principals, who were more than likely the main contact between the teachers and the district, were removed and teachers alluded to

personality problems between the principal and district staff. Could it be that a personal relationship led to district neglect even though test scores were plummeting? And, what could lead the district to ignore complaints matched with the many years of underperformance the teacher discussed? Is it merely because they had no mechanism or are there other reasons? Because they change the relationship between the school and the district, the school support specialist is a critical component to state early intervention.

In both schools, staff believed that the reason the district started to become involved with the school was because the district felt threatened by the state intervention. In the eyes of those in the schools the state intervention pushed the district into playing a more active and supportive role within the school and the first sign of the push was the replacement of the principal. In each school, principals and teachers described a sense that the district felt threatened by the state intervention into the school, and the threat at the district level pushed district administrators into action and engagement with the school. Brenda discusses the district's reaction:

> It did put a scare into the district. I believe. … [I]t's like finally the state is coming in and taking a look at these schools. [The district staff are] saying, 'Alright, well now, I guess we need to help.' But, what I'm saying is you should have done that a long time ago. (Brenda, teacher, Babson Elementary)

Beyond changes in the district-school relationship, early intervention resulted in dramatic changes within the school. Both schools received a new principal within months of being declared underperforming. Additionally each had a major change in their teaching staff with a 45% turnover at Alfred Elementary and an 80% turnover at Babson Elementary. In both cases, especially at Babson, they are practically entirely new schools.

Both principals indicated that moving to an underperforming school was not desirable. Ms. Beth felt like she had no choice but to move to Babson Elementary. Mr. Arnold, new to being a principal, said the only reason he got the opportunity to be a principal was because no one inside the district wanted the job, so they opened it up to applicants who were not principals and who were not in the district. He does not think he would be a principal now, if it had not been for the opportunity.

As far as the teachers are concerned, I spoke with staff that decided to stay. Mostly they stayed at their schools because they felt they had an obligation to the school. They fell back on their professional dedication for a reason to stay in an underperforming school. It is not to say the teachers did not consider leaving. Some teachers talked about transferring or leaving the underperforming school, but they decided to wait it out to see if the new principal changed things in the school.

There is a potentially positive side to teacher and principal turnover in a designated underperforming school. By bringing in new leadership into a school, there is a chance to make changes in the school for the better. Also, in some cases underperforming schools can become dumping grounds for ineffective teachers. The natural selection process of teachers leaving after a school is declared underperforming creates a sort of voluntary reconstitution of the underperforming school. With new leadership and many new teachers, the climate within the underperforming school is bound to go through a dramatic transformation.

The real difference between before and after a school is declared underperforming is best summed up in the words of a teacher.

> This is the best thing for our kids. Everything is documented, everything with this new principal. Nothing is swept under the

> rug. Everything is right on the carpet and everybody knows what's going on. It needs to be. (Adeline, Alfred Elementary)

The Early Intervention Process

Continually respecting the existing public education hierarchy, the DOE informs the superintendent and then begins to work directly with the underperforming school principal. The transfer of information about early intervention is given from the DOE liaison to the principal. The DOE liaison leaves it up to the principal to share the information with the school faculty. Because all of the information is shared, the state considers the early intervention process to be open and explicit. The DOE liaisons believed that because the principal was not calling them with questions, the preparation meetings and materials were thorough and effective.

However, there are a few problems with the DOE's strategy. First, the original principal is often removed from the school, and with him or her goes all of the information, which was shared with the principal for the underperforming school. Switching the principal in the midst of DOE's early intervention challenges the development of a working relationship between the state and the school because any effort to build a relationship with the school is lost when the principal, who is DOE's primary contact, is removed. Because the relationship building efforts are not directed toward the teachers, who are more likely to remain in the school, any goodwill or relationship that is developed through the process goes with the principal who is removed. Continuity of the relationship building process is therefore interrupted, though it is not lost.

As a new principal to the school, Ms. Beth felt that there was very little support coming from the DOE or from the district. She was placed at Babson Elementary at the end of the school year, about a week prior to the beginning of PIM training. PIM training is the "catch all" point when the school team is obligated to take on the school improvement efforts (switch from a deterrent to an enabling approach).

During the PIM, the issues facing the underperforming school are examined in excruciating detail by the school team (principal and teachers), and those in the school are faced with the reality that school improvement is in the team's hands, a difficult task for any new principal. The process can be overwhelming. The school support specialist has a role to play in continuing the relationship between the underperforming school and the DOE. Mr. Arnold describes one of the benefits of the support from the district school support specialists is the "history" they provide. The school support specialist is present during the entire process before and after the new principal comes on board. He or she is able to provide background and valuable information about the past administration and issues or challenges within the school to the new principal. This insight proves to be invaluable to the new administrator of an underperforming school.

Second, the teachers interviewed felt they never got "the big picture" of the early intervention process. They did recall receiving information about the state visits, schedules and questions; however, because it was disconnected from an overall understanding of the process, it was meaningless. So, even though it is considered to be an open process, the loss of a principal in the middle of intervention combined with the relatively "small picture" information provided to the teachers, leaves underperforming school teachers in the lurch. A new administrator brings a certain level of the unknown

to any school, but compiled with state intervention and being declared underperforming, teachers felt lost and uncertain about the future.

This brings me to the last point. New school accountability policy is designed to be a transparent process, but it is built on an assumption that those at the lower levels of the public education system (principals and teachers) will seek the information from the DOE. The habit of those in the school looking up to the DOE for information appeared to be foreign to the principals and teachers in the underperforming schools. Evidence of this was found in a survey of Massachusetts superintendents, principals, and teachers. Nearly 68% of the respondents reported that it was difficult or very difficult to obtain information from the DOE (McDermott, et al., 2001). This is despite the fact the a majority of the information and documents on early intervention, including the school specific reports, were found on the DOE's website.

Perhaps principals' and teachers' understanding of the DOE is a reflection of the traditional hierarchy, in which the DOE shares information with the district and the district informs the school of anything it needs to know. Or, perhaps it is because those in the school are in the habit of looking to the district rather than the DOE for information. Explanations of how information was communicated from the DOE to the district to the school was one in which information was disseminated from the top down. There is very little information moving up the hierarchy. Before new school accountability policy was implemented, the district would never think to contact the DOE, and the teachers were hesitant to contact the district about problems with their principal despite significant abuses occurring in the school. New school accountability policy, and particularly early intervention, functions in an environment in which two-way

communication is frequent and expected. The DOE seems to have changed the relationship between the state and the districts through the specialists and communication with the superintendents. However, they have had a number of years to change their relationship. Prior to the beginning of intervention, the more traditional mode of communication exists, where those in the school receive information from above, and have no habit of asking for or looking to the district or the DOE for information.

Teachers consistently did not know where to look for information or seek to understand the policy or the resulting reports about their school, or who was requiring a school improvement plan. For example, the Charlesburg district staff required each school to go through a PIM style school improvement planning process for developing a school improvement plan separate from the state's early intervention. Teachers interviewed were on these teams for the district school improvement planning, yet they were not clear on who was placing the demand upon them. One teacher explains,

> …[W]e started the SIP [School Improvement Plan] plan a year and a half ago...because we had to…
>
> *Interviewer: Who said you had to?*
>
> The district? Maybe the state? I don't know. Somebody said we had to write a SIP plan. It came down from whomever, and we went to training and all of this by the district. (Bridget, Babson Elementary)

Teachers had a limited understanding of new school accountability and were not clear that it is even a policy. As Maynard Moody and Musheno (2004) suggest, policies are something that happen to street-level bureaucrats, like teachers. Connection to the policies and the idea of forming or shaping policies is not part of their professional framework, nor are they generally engaged by policy makers. Without two-way

communication between the underperforming school and the district or the DOE, the opportunity to negotiate policy implementation in partnership is lost.

The teachers interviewed were all intelligent and professional, and this observation is by no means meant to imply a problem with them in particular. It is not surprising that the teachers who are managing the multiple demands on their time coming from students, parents, principals, district administrators, state level administrators and policy makers, do not find the time to understand fully what a policy means to them. Until they are faced with early intervention, any understanding of state policy, like new school accountability, is shaped by rumors and informal discussions among colleagues within the public education arena.

Even as principals and teachers are going through early intervention, they are overwhelmed and find it difficult to take the time to think or reflect upon their role or the policy. They are working in schools with tremendous challenges and needs, and are often running to put out one fire after another. State visits were nearly indistinguishable for the interview participants except as they related to different months in the academic calendar. Also, the School Panel Review and Fact Finding Review reports, which are available to the public on the DOE's website, were not read by the school staff members who were not handed the reports to read as members of the PIM planning team or who were not specifically shown the reports by the principal.

In both schools teachers described reading the reports as something that was shared with them, but not with others. One teacher sheepishly described cleaning out the old principal's office to prepare for the new principal and stumbling upon the report, which she subsequently read. Another teacher talked about the new principal sharing the

report with herself and another teacher as if it were confidential and an act of trust. In both schools I was assured that the other teachers in the building had not read the publicly available reports.

Even as they were going through early intervention, it was treated like something that other people had to deal with. Teachers in the schools were busy trying to implement portions of a school improvement plan or deal with the relatively dramatic changes within the school after it was declared underperforming, and they simply did not have the time to look at the reports about why they were declared underperforming. Teachers who are not involved in the improvement planning process rely upon the principal and the teachers who are involved to inform them about the shortcomings of the school cited in the reports.

I am not certain how this finding impacts early intervention. Regardless, it is prevalent in both schools. Perhaps it is simply a product of each of the schools only going through early intervention one time, so school staff did not understand different parts and concepts of it as well as district and DOE administrators might. It may also be that principals and teachers in underperforming schools are placed under enormous stress during early intervention, a finding supported by participant interviews, and simply do not have the time to react and think about the policy, who is requiring things of them, or the resulting reports. Evidently, to cope with the many demands placed upon those within the school, they depend upon a division of labor within the school in which the principal and the teachers on the school improvement planning team are the informants about the process and the changes within the school.

It puts into question how much of an impact early intervention can really have upon a school if those in the school are not paying attention to it. Developing the working relationship with the school may be in part the development of a communication line that is two-way, and empowers the principal of the underperforming school to reach up to the district or to the state for the help and support it needs. However, making a connection and developing a working relationship between the school and the DOE leads to a new partnership that has the potential to create change.

New State and Local Partnerships

Partnerships are indicative of the positive working relationship the DOE is developing with the local underperforming school and the district. However, there are some informal partnerships between the different levels of the public education system that are used to induce support and ultimately improvement of the delivery of education to students. These partnerships include a partnership between the DOE and the underperforming school, focused on engaging the district, as well as a partnership between the DOE and the district in an effort to support the district's involvement with the underperforming schools.

The DOE and the underperforming school are obviously connected during the beginning of intervention. More than providing a diagnosis, professional development and infrequent supports, the partnership between the DOE and the underperforming school is seen as a threat to the district and hence increases the involvement between the district and the underperforming school. By simply shaking up the traditional hierarchy of the public education system (connecting the school and the DOE), intervention causes

the district administrators to increase their involvement in the school. Principals and teachers in the schools articulated the fact that the district appeared to be more threatened by the DOE visit than they were. The DOE was less explicit, though they continually stated that the district is responsible for supporting its underperforming schools.

The principals' and teachers' understanding that the district administrators were threatened by the state's early intervention gave them a new feeling of power, when they had previously felt powerless. The power dynamic helps the principals (and teachers) to leverage the resources they need to improve the educational outcomes in their schools. Simply having regular access to the district administrators, rather than being left on their own, gave hope to the principals and teachers within the underperforming schools.

Likewise, the DOE wisely partnered with the district to support its efforts to improve the underperforming schools. By developing regular, two-way communication with the urban superintendents and by providing the district superintendents with the school support specialists, the district and the DOE have created a solid partnership. The good faith gesture of listening to the superintendents and providing them with the support they need to improve the delivery of education within the schools is largely what the partnership is based upon. The act is seen as supporting the district in the face of the threatening district accountability system. Because the state's district accountability system is administered outside of the DOE, the partnership is more likely to flourish because the DOE, as an organization, is seen as an ally without having to balance district support with holding districts accountable.

Additionally, there is a sense at the district level that the cooperation and support coming from the DOE is largely due to threats felt by those in the DOE. The threat may

be that the DOE might have to take over a school or a district. It is widely understood by those at the district level and many at the school level that the DOE simply does not want to take over a locally run district. So, whether the state policy makers are going to hold the DOE accountable is negligible compared to the threat that the DOE might actually have to start running schools, which state level administrators fully recognize they are not equipped to do.

In the larger picture of state education reform, the DOE functions as the "fixer." The DOE is facilitating the implementation of new school accountability policy concentrated upon early intervention that results in improvement, so as to avoid having to take over the schools and districts. By listening to those in the district and respecting the pre-accountability hierarchy of the public education system, the DOE administrators have placed themselves in the role of facilitator by using, developing, and strengthening the expertise at the lower levels and focusing it using a common framework.

Underperforming Schools are a District Problem

The bond between the school and the DOE in their partnership is that they both feel the district is truly responsible for school improvement. In the eyes of those in the school, the DOE or the state is simply not that significant of a player during early intervention. Early intervention for them is a means to an end. The means is the state visits and early intervention and the end is the result of more attention and support from the district. The relationship between the underperforming school and the DOE made the school level people nervous initially, but generally teachers and principals became comfortable with the process. Credit should be given to those in the DOE who have

made early intervention a thoughtful, gentle, and sincere process that focuses on identifying issues within the school and supporting the school staff to work to address these issues.

The DOE administrators believe that school improvement is a district's responsibility in adherence with the traditional organization of the public education system. Plus, the districts are more experienced and thus better equipped to support school improvement than the DOE. The past district and school relationship is deficient at best in the two underperforming schools studied. One teacher said she felt like even though they complained that the district wasn't hearing them, so at least by being declared underperforming these schools have a chance.

In many ways new school accountability is just part of an overarching plan by the states to fine-tune the organization of the public education system. They are looking at the schools and gently pushing the district to play a strong role and take on greater responsibility for accountability within its domain, and the states are implementing a district accountability system which directly pushes the district participate in the improvement of educational outcomes in all of its schools.

The state relationship was less important to those in the school, except that they found the people who visited them to be professional and courteous and that the reports reflected what they said. From the local perspective, a more important piece of state intervention was the district engagement with the underperforming school. State administrators agreed that the district's involvement in early intervention is critical because the district is responsible for improving the educational outcomes. The relationship the DOE developed with the school was important only in that the DOE

liaisons were able to monitor the school's progress and ensure the district administrators were playing an active role.

Conclusion

The working relationship between the SDE and the underperforming school does change over the course of early intervention. Generally, the change is positive, because the expectations those in the underperforming school have for the SDE are low, so any involvement is an improvement. Still, the SDE only takes the relationship so far. The expectation seems to be that they move from a coming apart with avoidance type of relationship to a cooperative but autonomous relationship. It is an inexact determination because involvement levels between the two definitely increase, but from the SDE administrator's perspective, the relationship remains somewhat distant despite a growing respect and trust. From the underperforming school staff's perspective the SDE plays a minimal role when compared to the change in relationship with the district.

The district, still under the threat of district accountability, actively improves its relationship with the state identified underperforming school during early intervention. Prior to state intervention, the relationship between the district and school can be characterized as coming apart and contentious. It is a type of relationship that can only be changed if something or someone intervenes to break the vicious, downward cycle (Scheberle, 1997). Early intervention serves as the catalyst to change the relationship between the underperforming school and the district. The SDE works with the district to support its efforts, and improve their own relationship. The school support specialists are

a resource the SDE provides to the districts in an effort to persuade (Gormley, 1998) them to partner with them and implement the SDE's "one best framework."

Consequently, the state provided and supported district school support specialists become the "fixers" of policy implementation. They are in the middle of early intervention. As advocates, ambassadors, and negotiators of the implementation of new school accountability policy, they are in charge of what Lin (2000) describes as important to the implementation process: fitting the policy into the local context. Brought in as partners to the SDE and embedded in the district, they are the bridge between the state's external and the school's internal accountability systems. The connection is a critical component to improving the delivery of educational outcomes in the underperforming school.

It is not entirely clear whether those in the underperforming school recognize the SDE's dependence upon a cooperative relationship. What is more clear is that professional educators within the school, once they meet SDE representatives who are sincere, courteous, and respectful, are more than willing to cooperate. Interestingly, those in the school tended to recognize the district's dependence upon them more than the state's dependence. Principals and teachers mentioned that sometimes they felt like the district was afraid of what they would say to the SDE. That sense contributed to their feeling of empowerment, and power over the district, especially after years of feeling neglected by the district.

Implementation of new school accountability is constrained by limitations in the SDE's resources. However, the working relationship with the school, but more importantly the district, helps to expand the state resources. Providing school support

specialists to the district helps the state to connect to the district and to use the expertise and knowledge that exists within the district. By adding specialists whose primary objective is to impact school improvement, the district in turn has expanded its capacity. The working relationship between the SDE and the district has changed into one that approaches, however imperfectly, a "pulling together and synergistic" type of relationship with growing levels of involvement and trust that improve over each underperforming school review cycle.

The problem of the locals' understanding of new school accountability policy as a deterrent versus an enabling system was lessened for the school because the early intervention strategy focuses on identification, diagnosis and support guided by the state. Additionally, the teachers in the schools are professionals, and embedded in the profession is the idea of taking the responsibility to make improvements. With direction from the DOE and the support of the district, schools were given a focus and had a greater feeling of empowerment, especially after major changes in staff and the change in principal occurred. At least this is the case in the short term. How long the change or improvements last is beyond the parameters of this study. Certainly, new school accountability policy is a deterrent policy, but what it has going for it is the professional educator who, because of professional training, innately feels enabled to improve the educational situation within his or her school. Even the deterrent nature of new school accountability cannot undermine an educator's professional ethic.

In Massachusetts, the SDE has developed a framework for early intervention that enhances and builds upon the pre-existing strengths within the state's public education system. I expected to find an SDE that was fumbling and trying to be more controlling of

the early intervention process, and what I found was staff in the SDE who were abundantly aware of their limitations and who were willing to learn from the mistakes made in other states. In other words, I found an SDE which was much more adept than I expected at implementing complex reforms. By engaging all of the local levels the SDE broadens its capacity, expertise and ability to implement new school accountability in the local context, a point that is often found to be important to successfully impact school improvement (e.g., Fullan, 2001).

New school accountability policy as part of a systemic accountability system (including districts) and education reform package does effectively change schools in the short term by changing district and state priorities. If understanding the working relationship between entities influences the effectiveness of policy (Agranoff & Lindsay, 1983; Scheberle, 1997; Seidman, 1980), then the positive working relationships developed between the SDE and the underperforming school, the SDE and the district, and the district and the underperforming school may be helpful in improving educational outcomes and avoiding further interventions.

When policymakers envisioned school accountability policy, it appears that they wanted a deterrent policy that motivated schools into compliance. The idea behind the policy seems to be that if resources were aligned at a common target then the focus would increase efficiency within a school so that it would improve. In the cases when a school was found to be underperforming, the DOE would intervene and tighten up the focus of the educators within the school. Then the school could accomplish the student achievement goals set before it, and in doing so, ensure the state was meeting its

constitutional responsibility of providing an adequate education to all students within Massachusetts.

Anyone involved in education knows that establishing goals and providing increased focus are not as simple as the new school accountability policy implies. More than that, in the process of requiring SDE's to hold schools accountable, there was little to no recognition of the dramatic changes it would require within the organizations that comprise the public education system in terms of skills, capacity and culture. Consequently, SDE's are forced to use strategic criteria to make decisions about which schools will receive state services and which schools will not.

Mintrop and Trujillo (2004) found that states use a number of methods to balance their capacity limitations with the need at the local schools. In some states there are never more schools in need than the SDE can handle in a given year. In others the state intervention is distant and dependent upon the educators within the local school and district. Massachusetts falls into the category of "ambitious goals" (Mintrop & Trujillo, 2004) but lacks the capacity to fully implement them. If improvement in underperforming schools is truly the intended outcome of the policymaker, it cannot have been their intention to water down policies so that underperforming schools were given weak supports to improve on their own. Nor can it have been their intention to only intervene in the worst schools and leaving the other underperforming schools to fend for themselves.

Declaring schools underperforming without injecting capacity building activities necessary in the mild and moderate forms of intervention is irresponsible. It places SDE's in a position in which they must make choices about values and priorities as to

how they will approach school accountability measures. Will they water them down so that the number of underperforming schools is never more than the number the SDE can manage in a given year? Or will they prioritize the underperforming schools based on those with the most need and work from the bottom up? Will they ever be able to truly develop local capacity so that no student is placed in an underperforming school?

In a sense the approach the DOE took in Massachusetts is contrary to a traditional bureaucratic approach which typically distributes its limited resources to as many of the entities (e.g., underperforming schools) in need as it can, thus watering down the impact any resources or interventions might have upon an underperforming school. Even more typical in the public education system is to work with the schools that have problems, but need the least help. These schools tend to be more receptive to outside help because there is a level of internal infrastructure that allows them to use outside help. Additionally, by expending resources upon the less troubled schools, fewer resources are expended on easier to accomplish solutions (or supports) before getting to the schools in the most need. In fact, the schools that are most in need of help are often the ones that are least able to access outside assistance and effectively use outside support. Their needs for resources are therefore greater and solutions are not easily found or known.

The approach in Massachusetts turns this upside down by intervening and building capacity into the schools at the bottom first. The bottom up approach speaks to the need for a strategy for those schools that are not the worst in the state, but clearly performing at insufficient levels. Perhaps these schools do not need as much intervention as the worst schools; however, they are still underperforming and are in need of some supports and some assistance. Policymakers should allocate resources to target these

schools specifically, while carefully avoiding temptations to water down the existing capacity and system of DOE intervention in the worst underperforming schools. In a way, the school support specialist position is an attempt to manage the other underperforming schools in the state. DOE hopes that by placing the specialists in the district, practices and capacity building strategies will be disseminated and used in other underperforming schools not being intervened in by the DOE. The DOE has created a framework, which is modeled for the district and the school support specialists within them, to implement in the other schools in the area. By injecting the ongoing capacity and training into the urban districts, the DOE has gained a partner and expanded capacity to effect school improvement.

CHAPTER XI

FUTURE RESEARCH

There are many directions future research on the subject of new school accountability and the state and local working relationship can take. Potential future research topics are varied, ranging from working relationships, roles and responsibilities, reorganization of state public education systems and local governance.

This research shows that state intervention in an underperforming school can have a positive outcome. In the schools studied, participants reported years of neglect from the district, poor leadership by the principal, and little to no accountability for the teachers. State intervention really shed some light onto these issues. Changes that were slow in coming, if they were coming at all, began to happen very quickly. Changes in staff and replacing the former principal, along with improved relations with the district, created a new dynamic in the school that teachers could really feel. It would be worthwhile to see how typical the experience of these schools and the Charlesburg district are when compared to other states, other districts and other schools. Is the Massachusetts DOE taking a particular approach that is more likely to lead to a positive outcome? Are the findings a result of a change in how the district superintendent and administrators understand their role? Further research is necessary to see how typical these findings are.

A study should be designed to answer the looming question of whether the threat of district accountability actually does motivate a district to engage in a meaningful relationship with the underperforming school. Is the threat of state intervention in the

district really a motivator for the district to engage with the school and make rapid changes in the school for improvement? One suggestion for study would be to compare the findings in a district that has not been taken over, like Charlesburg, with a district that has been taken over by the state. Questions about how the state taking on a strong role with the district would impact the DOE's relationship with the underperforming school would need to be answered. Additionally, it would be interesting to find out how the DOE's expectations for the district's relationship with the underperforming schools would change in the circumstance when the DOE is intervening in the district as well.

Another area of interest in the area of identifying how typical these findings are would be to compare the two Massachusetts districts designated as underperforming, since one is urban and one is rural. The manner in which the SDE approaches these schools and how they interact with the districts would likely be different. Such a study would truly test the "one best framework" finding in this study. Additionally, in a smaller rural district there may be much different results. For example, underperforming school principals and teachers may be less likely to leave the school if they are in a rural setting because there are a limited number of alternative opportunities. In those cases SDE and districts would need to work with existing staff and would not have the opportunity to "start over" as the schools from the Charlesburg district did. Also, there is likely a lot less district capacity for a smaller rural district to become the "fixer."

New school accountability policy and NCLB in particular provide for one policy to suit many districts. Right now, many urban districts have an abundance of underperforming schools, but what happens when a school is declared underperforming in a rural district? How does the working relationship change between the DOE and the

district, the DOE and the underperforming school and the district and the underperforming school? Are the strategies different in an urban verses rural district?

Questions about the roles and responsibilities of the SDE, the district and the school abound. Throughout the examination of the working relationship, some of the ideas suggested by participants about their roles and responsibilities and those of the organization they are affiliated with seemed self-evident. I assumed, as I suppose many do, that the district held schools accountable and communication between them is frequent, but at least in Charlesburg, it did not seem to be the case. As far as the SDE is concerned, when discussing new school accountability the discussion about centralizing the control of state public education systems, and taking away local authority is never far behind.

My findings, however, indicated that there is at least some expectation by those in the school and district that there would be some direction, focus and support provided by the entity above their organization in the loosely coupled hierarchy of the public education system. Could it be that local control is a way of avoiding responsibility at higher levels of the public education system? Certainly local control could be used this way, but it is more likely that there is an imbalance in the system that needs to be remedied. Research on the imbalance and where local control stops and state responsibility begins within a state would be an interesting endeavor, especially in the context of new accountability systems imposed by the state and federal governments.

Governance structures in terms of local school boards are really not examined at all. I have to admit that I did pose the question about the local school committee to interview participants at the school and district levels, but the answers to the question proved difficult to interpret. Surprisingly, this was not because the involvement of the

school committee is so complicated. Rather there seemed to be a limited response (if any at all) by the members of the school committee. A review of local school committee meeting minutes hardly registered a comment about the number of underperforming schools in the Charlesburg district. Is it simply that the local school board members do not feel they have a responsibility toward the district and its underperforming schools? Is it a sign of the failing of local governance in and of itself? Have local school boards become irrelevant?

All these are interesting questions, but the role is likely more complicated than they suggest. I believe that the members of the local school committees feel school accountability and underperformance is something for the knowledgeable professional educators to attack and remedy, though I did not test this hypothesis. As the lay committee members, they are able to allocate the funds, though under the current fiscal constraints that authority is limited, and advocate for pet projects of the community, but they do not consider themselves expert educators, and thus leave such issues to those who are. A study of the reaction of school committee members and what they believe their responsibilities are under new accountability would be interesting and provide insight into the ever evolving nature of public school governance.

This study is a first foray into understanding the beginning of intervention in the context of new school accountability policy. Within the subtext of the policy one can see the changing role of the SDE, and the revitalization of the district's role as it relates to the underperforming school. There is a different kind of focus in the public education system because of external accountability, but its real strength is when it has meaning to the educators in the classroom. A positive working relationship, or any working relationship

amongst the SDE, the district and the school is a start, but it is clear that there are many more steps along the way.

APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Dissertation Title: The Beginning of Intervention

Massachusetts Department of Education
Interview Questions

To:
From: Susan Bowles Therriault
RE: Interview on DATE, 2004 at TIME

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study. The following information is being provided for your review prior to our interview. While, it is unlikely that we will address all of the interview questions within the 60 minute time block allotted for the interview, I have still provided you with them so that you are able to understand the direction of this research. Please contact me if you have any questions or concerns.

Researcher:

Susan Bowles Therriault
Education Policy & Leadership
University of Massachusetts
Amherst, MA 01003

Phone: 978.369.1532
Email: sbowles@educ.umass.edu

Introduction/ Project Description:

This research is being conducted for my dissertation. I am particularly interested in the early phases of intervention and the working relationship that develops between the state and the school. My questions are mainly focused on understanding the intricacies and complexities of that relationship from your perspective. Your perspective is of the utmost importance, and I appreciate your honesty and sincerity. Please know that the results from this research will be part of my dissertation, but all individuals and schools will remain anonymous.

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Massachusetts Department of Education Interview Questions

Personal Information

1. How long have you been working at the Department of Education?
2. What did you do before working at the DOE?
3. Have you ever worked in a school and/or district? If yes, how long and in what capacity?

Understanding of New School Accountability Policy

4. What do you think of the school accountability policy within Massachusetts?
5. What do you believe its purpose is?
6. How well or not so well does it achieve its purpose?
7. How well or not so well is the DOE supported when implementing school accountability?

Working Relationship

8. If it is possible to generalize, what kind of a relationship do you (or DOE) try to develop with a school/staff that is under review? That is declared underperforming?
9. Having been through several cycles of reviewing and identifying underperforming schools, do you think the "school" perceptions about the state/DOE change as they go through the panel reviews, and the fact finding reviews, and thereafter If yes, how? If no, why?
10. Do you find your (DOE) perceptions of the school change during the review process? If yes, how? If no, why?
11. Is cooperation between the DOE and the school important?
12. Do you find the schools to be cooperative? Does this change over time/ during the Panel Reviews or Fact-Finding Reviews?
13. What factors increase or decrease the ability for the DOE to work with a school?
14. What are your expectations of an underperforming school that DOE is working with?

The Beginning of Intervention - *Identification of the School for Review*

15. What do you find to be the easiest/most difficult part of selecting as school for review?
16. How do you think the principal and/or staff feel when their school is selected for review?
17. How would you characterize the DOE's relationship with a school selected for review?

The Beginning of Intervention - *School Panel Review*

18. From the state perspective, what is the goal of the School Panel Review?
19. What do you find to be the easiest/most difficult part of the Panel Review?
20. Specifically what is the role of: a) the DOE liaison, b) School Support Specialist, and c) ABC Consulting during the School Panel Review?
21. How do you think the principal and/or staff perceive the DOE staff (review teams) when they are going through a School Panel Review? Is this different from before?
22. What is the role of: a) the underperforming school district superintendent, b) underperforming school principal, and c) the school faculty during the School Panel Review?
23. After the School Panel Review, how would you generally characterize the DOE's relationship with the underperforming school?

The Beginning of Intervention - *Determination of School Underperformance*

24. What do you find to be the easiest/most difficult part of identifying a school as underperforming?
25. How do you think the principal and/or staff feel when their school is identified as underperforming?
26. How does a school being identified as underperforming impact the DOE relationship with the school?

Contractor Interview Questions

Personal Information

27. How long have you been working at ABC Consulting?
28. How long have you been participating in School Panel Reviews and Fact-Finding Reviews?
29. Do you come from the field of education? If yes, what did you do there?

New School Accountability Policy

30. What do you believe is the purpose of school accountability policy within Massachusetts?
31. Do you think the policy suits its purpose?
32. If you can recall, how did you find the relationship between the state and the underperforming school during the first visit you conducted? Has this changed? How?
33. How are you prepared/trained to conduct school visits?
34. How do you think those in the school staff feel about school accountability policy before they are visited? Did this change?

Roles

35. What do you consider your role in this school accountability process?
36. Do you think that others that work for ABC Consulting approach this role differently? If yes, how?
37. What do you believe is your role during the beginning of intervention (school panel review, identification of underperformance, and fact finding review)?
38. What do you believe is the role of the Department of Education during the beginning of intervention?
39. What do you believe is the role of the district during the beginning of intervention?
40. What do you believe is the role of the Principal and school staff is during the beginning of intervention?
41. What is the role of the School Support Specialist during the beginning of intervention?
42. Is there anyone else that has a significant role during the beginning of intervention?

Working Relationship

43. How would you characterize the relationship between the school and the Department of Education prior to being identified as underperforming? How did this change when the school is:
    1. Visited for a School Panel Review?
    2. Identified as an Underperforming School?
    3. Visited for a Fact-Finding Review?
    4. "Diagnosed" (after the Fact Finding Review Report)?
44. What do you believe the working relationship between the Department of Education and the school should ideally be during the beginning of intervention?
45. Is the early school accountability process (visits, diagnosis) designed to establish this ideal working relationship?
46. What do you believe the working relationship between the District and the school should ideally be during the beginning of intervention?

The Beginning of Intervention - *School Panel Review*

47. What do you think about the school panel review and the process?
48. If you can generalize, how do you think potentially underperforming schools (principal and staff) feel about the School Panel Review?
49. Generally, how do you think the Department of Education School Review Panel is perceived during the review?
50. What do you find to be the strengths and weaknesses of this part of the process?
51. How would you characterize the relationship between the DOE and the potentially underperforming school during the review?

The Beginning of Intervention - *Identification as an Underperforming School*

52. Do you get any information about the reaction of those in the school when they are identified as underperforming?
53. How involved in this part of the process are you or is ABC Consulting?
54. What do you find to be the strengths and weaknesses of this part of the process?
55. How would you characterize your relationship with the DOE at this point in time? Is this different from before?

The Beginning of Intervention - *Fact-Finding Review*

56. How is the ABC Consulting chaired panel perceived by the principal and staff during the review?
57. How is the DOE perceived by the school during the review?
58. What do you find to be the strengths and weaknesses of this part of the process?
59. How would you characterize the relationship between the DOE and the underperforming school during this review? Is this different from before?

The Beginning of Intervention - *Reflection/Expectations/Support*

60. Do you think the school staff's perceptions of the DOE changed during the process?
61. Do you think the DOE's perceptions about the school change during this process?
62. It seems that the DOE needs the cooperation and ownership for improvement of those within the school and district to truly improve educational outcomes, how does or doesn't this process motivate/encourage cooperation and ownership within the school?
63. Does the district have a role in ensuring school cooperation and ownership of improvement strategies?

District School Support Specialist

Personal Information

64. How long have you been working as a School Support Specialist?
65. What did you do before this?
66. Have you ever worked in a school and/or district? At the DOE? If yes, how long and in what capacity?

Understanding of New School Accountability Policy

67. What do you think of the school accountability policy within Massachusetts?
68. What do you believe its purpose is?
69. How well or not so well does it achieve its purpose?
70. How well or not so well is the are you supported when implementing school accountability?

Working Relationship

71. If it is possible to generalize, what kind of a relationship do you (or DOE) try to develop with a school/staff that is under review? That is declared underperforming?
72. Having been through several cycles of reviewing and identifying underperforming schools, do you think the "school" perceptions about the state/DOE change as they go through the panel reviews, and the fact finding reviews, and thereafter If yes, how? If no, why?
73. Do you find your (DOE) perceptions of the school change during the review process? If yes, how? If no, why?
74. Is cooperation between the DOE and the school important?
75. Do you find the schools to be cooperative? Does this change over time/ during the Panel Reviews or Fact-Finding Reviews?
76. What factors increase or decrease the ability for the DOE to work with a school?
77. What are your expectations of an underperforming school that DOE is working with?

The Beginning of Intervention - *Identification of the School for Review*

78. What do you find to be the easiest/most difficult part of selecting as school for review?
79. How do you think the principal and/or staff feel when their school is selected for review?
80. How would you characterize the DOE's relationship with a school selected for review?

The Beginning of Intervention - *School Panel Review*

81. From the state perspective, what is the goal of the School Panel Review?
82. What do you find to be the easiest/most difficult part of the Panel Review?
83. Specifically what is the role of: a) the DOE liaison, b) School Support Specialist, and c) ABC Consulting during the School Panel Review?
84. How do you think the principal and/or staff perceive the DOE staff (review teams) when they are going through a School Panel Review? Is this different from before?
85. What is the role of: a) the underperforming school district superintendent, b) underperforming school principal, and c) the school faculty during the School Panel Review?
86. After the School Panel Review, how would you generally characterize the DOE's relationship with the underperforming school?

The Beginning of Intervention - *Determination of School Underperformance*

87. What do you find to be the easiest/most difficult part of identifying a school as underperforming?
88. How do you think the principal and/or staff feel when their school is identified as underperforming?
89. How does a school being identified as underperforming impact the DOE relationship with the school?

The Beginning of Intervention - *Fact-Finding Review*

90. From the state perspective, what is the goal of the Fact-Finding Review?
91. What do you find to be the easiest/most difficult part of the Fact-Finding Review?
92. How involved is the DOE in this process? In what capacity?
93. Specifically what is the role of: a) the DOE liaison, b) School Support Specialist, and c) ABC Consulting in the FFR?
94. How do you think the principal and/or staff perceive the DOE staff (review teams) when they are going through a Fact-Finding Review? Is this different from before?
95. What is the role of: a) the underperforming school district superintendent, b) underperforming school principal, and c) the school faculty during the Fact-Finding Review?
96. After the Fact-Finding Review, how would you generally characterize the DOE's relationship with the underperforming school?

The Beginning of Intervention - *Reflection/Expectations/Support*

97. Upon reflection, do you find that a school's perceptions of the DOE change as the process moves on? If yes, are you able to generalize about when this occurs?
98. It seems that the DOE needs the cooperation and ownership for improvement of those within the school and district to truly improve educational outcomes, how does or doesn't this process motivate/encourage cooperation and ownership within the school?
99. Do you (SSS) have a role in ensuring school cooperation and ownership of improvement strategies?
100. Has your understanding of the school's, district's and DOE's role change during this process?

The Beginning of Intervention - *Fact-Finding Review*

101. From the state perspective, what is the goal of the Fact-Finding Review?
102. What do you find to be the easiest/most difficult part of the Fact-Finding Review?
103. How involved is the DOE in this process? In what capacity?
104. Specifically what is the role of: a) the DOE liaison, b) School Support Specialist, and c) ABC Consulting in the FFR?
105. How do you think the principal and/or staff perceive the DOE staff (review teams) when they are going through a Fact-Finding Review? Is this different from before?
106. What is the role of: a) the underperforming school district superintendent, b) underperforming school principal, and c) the school faculty during the Fact-Finding Review?
107. After the Fact-Finding Review, how would you generally characterize the DOE's relationship with the underperforming school?

The Beginning of Intervention - *Reflection/Expectations/Support*

108. Upon reflection, do you find that a school's perceptions of the DOE change as the process moves on? If yes, are you able to generalize about when this occurs?

109. It seems that the DOE needs the cooperation and ownership for improvement of those within the school and district to truly improve educational outcomes, how does or doesn't this process motivate/encourage cooperation and ownership within the school?

110. Do you (DOE) have a role in ensuring school cooperation and ownership of improvement strategies?

111. Has your understanding of the school's, district's and DOE's role change during this process?

Underperforming School (Principals and Teachers) Interview Questions

Personal Information

112. How long have you been working at this school and/or district?

113. What did you do before working at this school?

114. How long have you been in the field of education?

New School Accountability Policy

115. What do you believe is the purpose of school accountability policy within Massachusetts?

116. Do you think the policy suits its purpose?

117. If you can recall, how did you feel about the policy before your school was visited by the state? Did this change after you were visited?

118. Where did you get information about school accountability before the school was visited?

119. How do you think the school staff felt about the policy before your school was visited? Did this change?

120. Have you participated on a school panel review or fact finding review panel for another school beside your own? If yes, did this change your perspective on the process at all? If not, why not?

Roles

121. What do you consider your role in this school accountability process (as part of a school that is presently in need of improvement)?

122. Do you think that others in the school approach this role differently? If yes, how?

123. Did you talk to others that had been in this position before? If yes, do you find that your experience has been similar or dissimilar?

124. What do you believe is your role (and the role of those within the school), during the beginning of intervention (school panel review, identification of underperformance, and fact finding review)?

125. What do you believe is the role of the Department of Education during the beginning of intervention?

126. What do you believe is the role of the district during the beginning of intervention?

127. What is the role of the School Support Specialist during the beginning of intervention?

128. Is there anyone else that has a significant role during the beginning of intervention?

Working Relationship

129. How would you characterize the relationship between your school and the Department of Education prior to being identified as underperforming? How did this change when your school was:

    1. Visited for a School Panel Review?
    2. Identified as an Underperforming School?
    3. Visited for a Fact-Finding Review?
    4. "Diagnosed" (after the Fact Finding Review Report)?

130. What do you believe the working relationship between the Department of Education and your school should ideally be during the beginning of intervention?

131. How would you characterize the relationship between your school and the district prior to being identified as underperforming? How did this change when your school was:

    1. Visited for a School Panel Review?

2. Identified as an Underperforming School?
3. Visited for a Fact-Finding Review?
4. "Diagnosed" (after the Fact Finding Review Report)?

132. What do you believe the working relationship between the District and your school should ideally be during the beginning of intervention?

133. What is the role of the School Support Specialist during the beginning of intervention?

The Beginning of Intervention - *School Panel Review*

134. How did you feel about the review?

135. How did the staff within the school feel about the review?

136. How did you perceive the Department of Education Panel during the review? How did the staff perceive the state panel?

137. What do you find to be the strengths and weaknesses of this part of the process?

138. How would you characterize your relationship during this review?

The Beginning of Intervention - *Identification as an Underperforming School*

139. What was your reaction when your school was identified as underperforming?

140. What was the reaction of the staff within the school when your school was identified as underperforming?

141. What was the reaction of the district when your school was identified as underperforming?

142. What do you find to be the strengths and weaknesses of this part of the process?

143. How would you characterize your relationship with the DOE at this point in time? Is this different from before?

The Beginning of Intervention - *Fact-Finding Review*

144. How did you feel about the review?

145. How did the staff within the school feel about the review?

146. How did you perceive the Department of Education Panel during the review? How did the staff perceive the state panel?

147. What do you find to be the strengths and weaknesses of this part of the process?

148. How would you characterize your relationship during this review? Is this different from before?

The Beginning of Intervention - *Reflection/Expectations/Support*

149. Upon reflection, do you find that a school's perceptions of the DOE change as the process moves on? If yes, are you able to generalize about when this occurs?

150. Do you think the school staff's perceptions of the DOE changed during the process?

151. Do you think the DOE's perceptions about the school change during this process?

152. It seems that the DOE needs the cooperation and ownership for improvement of those within the school and district to truly improve educational outcomes, how does or doesn't this process motivate/encourage cooperation and ownership within the school?

APPENDIX B

INFORMED CONSENT

INFORMATION FOR PARTICIPANTS DURING OBSERVATIONS

Title of the Study:	The Beginning of Intervention: Working Relationships between the State Department of Education and the Underperforming School
Name of Researcher:	Susan Bowles, Doctoral Student, Education Policy and Leadership, University of Massachusetts Amherst
Contact Information:	Phone: 978-369-1532 Email: sbowles@educ.umass.edu

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Introduction

Hello, I am a doctoral student enrolled at the University of Massachusetts in the Education Policy, Research and Administration program. Currently, I am conducting a research project in an area of educational policy that has captured my interest over the past four years. This study focuses on the working relationship between the Massachusetts Department of Education and the underperforming school as it enters into the early phases on school accountability intervention.

Objective:
To research the evolution of the working relationship between the staff in the Massachusetts Department of Education (DOE) and underperforming schools during the earliest phases of diagnosis and intervention under the state and federally mandated school accountability system. The project will be informed by a combination of data gathered through observations of the school accountability process and through loosely structured interviews aimed at gaining insight into the perceptions of the state: Department of Education staff, School Works staff, and school support specialists that are working with underperforming school(s) and the perceptions of the locals: underperforming school staff, and district staff that are working with the DOE.

Study Description

This is both a study of policy implementation and intergovernmental working relationships. Essential to both of these topics is an understanding of the context in which policy is implemented and the attitudes and perceptions that are developed as two organizations negotiate school accountability policy implementation. Within the study your perceptions of and attitudes toward the policy, and toward the Department of Education/underperforming school are key to understanding this context.

This investigation will primarily consist of observations of the process of diagnosis and intervention as well as loosely structured interviews with individuals involved in school accountability intervention at the state level (Massachusetts Department of Education officials, School Works consultants, district school support specialists) and individuals at the local level (School principals, school staff, and district superintendents).

As part of the public education system within Massachusetts, you have first-hand experience dealing with school accountability intervention. Observing the process the state and the school go through during diagnosis and intervention is important to understanding the school accountability process. As you know, the many mandates of the *Massachusetts Education Reform Act, 1993* and the federal *No Child Left Behind Act, 2001* have brought new challenges to public schools within the state. This study will increase the understanding of how this state law manifests itself within the Department of Education and in the school and district.

The results of this study will be written up as a formal research paper, for my dissertation, and will possibly used as a reference in any future research I may conduct. During the observation portion of this study emphasis is placed upon the process and the interaction between the state and the school. Individual names and organizations will not be named specifically. Every effort will be made to protect your identity when disseminating results in both the oral and written format.

Massachusetts School Accountability Stages under Observation

Stage Two: School Panel Reviews
- Preparation
- Visits/meetings
- Wrap-up meeting

Stage Three: Fact-Finding Review
- Preparation
- Visits/Meetings

Interviewees

State
- Department of Education Officials (Associate Commissioner, Managers, Department of Education Liaisons)
- School Works Staff (staff and consultants hired to participate in diagnosis and intervention in underperforming schools)
- School Support Specialists located in the districts and trained by the Department of Education

Local
- District Superintendent and staff
- Underperforming School Principal
- Underperforming Staff involved with DOE

Questions

If you have any questions or concerns about this study, please feel free to contact me.

Susan Bowles
Phone: 978-369-1532
Email: sbowles@educ.umass.edu

Thank you for agreeing to participate in the OBSERVATION portion of this study.

INFORMED CONSENT FOR INTERVIEW PARTICIPANTS

Title of the Study: The Beginning of Intervention: Working Relationships between the State Department of Education and the Underperforming School

Name of Researcher: Susan Bowles, Doctoral Student, Education Policy and Leadership, University of Massachusetts Amherst

Contact Information: Phone: 978-369-1532
Email: sbowles@educ.umass.edu

Introduction

Hello, I am a doctoral student enrolled at the University of Massachusetts in the Education Policy, Research and Administration program. Currently, I am conducting a research project in an area of educational policy that has captured my interest over the past four years. This study focuses on the working relationship between the Massachusetts Department of Education and the underperforming school as it enters into the early phases on school accountability intervention.

This is both a study of policy implementation and intergovernmental working relationships. Essential to both of these topics is an understanding of the context in which policy is implemented and the attitudes and perceptions that are developed as two organizations negotiate school accountability policy implementation. Within the study your perceptions of and attitudes toward the policy, and toward the Department of Education/underperforming school are key to understanding this context.

This investigation will primarily consist of loosely structured interviews with individuals involved in school accountability intervention at the state level (Massachusetts Department of Education officials, School Works consultants, district school support specialists) and individuals at the local level (School principals, school staff, and district superintendents).

As part of the public education system within Massachusetts, you have first-hand experience dealing with school accountability intervention. Your insight and voice are important to the school accountability process. As you know, the many mandates of the Massachusetts Education Reform Act, 1993 have brought new challenges to public schools within the state. This study will increase the understanding of how this state law manifests itself within the Department of Education and in the school and district.

The results of this study will be written up as a formal research paper, for my dissertation, and will possibly used as a reference in any future research I may conduct. Your participation is entirely voluntary, and you are free to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty or prejudice. Every effort will be made to protect your identity through the use of pseudonyms or by referring to your comments by your position, rather than your name or organization, when disseminating results in both the oral and written format.

INFORMED CONSENT

Title of the Study: The Beginning of Intervention: Working Relationships between the State Department of Education and the Underperforming School

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Directions

If you agree to participate in this study it will require you to set aside time for an interview. The purpose of the interview is to obtain you general thoughts, ideas and perceptions of the state school review. The interview will take approximately 45 minutes.

You have been given two copies of this informed consent. If you agree to participate, please sign and date each copy. This signature indicates that you have read and understand the information within this consent form and your willingness to participate in this study. I will keep one copy of this informed consent. Please keep the other copy for your records. If you have any questions, at any time during this study, feel free to contact me at 978-369-1532 or email me at sbowles@educ.umass.edu.

Consent for Voluntary Participation

I volunteer to participate in this qualitative study and understand that:

1. I will be interviewed by Susan Bowles using a loosely structured interview method.
2. The questions I will be answering address my views on issues related to the early phases of intervention under school accountability policy with specific emphasis on the relationship between the state and local organizations involved in this intervention.
3. The interview will be tape recorded to facilitate analysis of the data.
4. My name will not be used nor will I be identified personally in any way or at any time. I understand it will be necessary to identify participants in the dissertation by position (i.e. principal, teacher, department of education liaison) and organizational affiliation (i.e. state, district, school).
5. I may withdraw from part or all of this study at any time.
6. I have the right to review material prior to the final oral exam or other publication.
7. I understand that results from this interview will be included in Susan Bowles' doctoral dissertation and may also be included in manuscripts submitted to professional journals for publication.
8. I am free to participate or not to participate without prejudice.
9. Because of the small number of participants, I understand that there is some risk that I may be identified as a participant in the study, though every effort will be made to maintain anonymity.

Researcher's Signature	Date:	Participant's Signature	Date:

APPENDIX C

CHARLESBURG SCHOOL DISTRICT
DEMOGRAPHIC DATA

Table C.1: Individual School Enrollment Report October 1, 2004

Grade	K	1	2	3	4	5	k-5	TOTAL
CharlesburgDistrict	1980	2171	2021	1955	2041	2045	12213	26031
Alfred Elementary	49	51	44	48	43	45	280	280
Babson Elementary	53	61	50	47	60	50	321	321

Table C.2: 1999 and 2003 Charlesburg Public School District and State Comparison of Total Per Pupil Expenditures

	District		State	
	1999	2003	1999	2003
Total Day Program Expenditures	$177,401,550	$209,953,632	$6,395,235,205	$8,024,795,656
Number of Pupils (FTE)	26,171	26,374	955,592	969,995

(Data Source: Massachusetts Department of Education, 2004)

Table C.3: 1999 and 2003 Charlesburg Public School District and Massachusetts Comparison of Per Pupil Expenditures, by Category

	District		State	
	1999	2003	1999	2003
Regular Education	$5,289	$6,212	$5,487	$6,779
Special Education	$10,938	$13,062	$10,249	$13,542
Bilingual Education	$6,104	$6,772	$7,495	$8,936
Occupational Day Education	$7,605	$8,118	$9,404	$11,154
All Day Programs	$6,779	$7,961	$6,692	$8,273

(Data Source: Massachusetts Department of Education , 2004)

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